

The Lost Stories of Warwick Deeping

Volumes I-IX

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VOLUME VII

THE LOST STORIES OF WARWICK DEEPING

REAL LIFE STORIES by Famous Authors

YEW TREE FARM

by Warwick Deeping



She saw a figure among the orchard trees—a figure that groped and blundered blindly.

EVERYTHING was to be a dream. John had put off khaki; Kitty had worn her nurse's uniform for the last time. They were to be married.

Their ideal was a little place in the country, chicken and fruit farming, though, perhaps, it was more John's ideal than Kitty's, for John had saved about twelve hundred pounds, and he came of country stock.

He did not want to go back to an office, and Kitty was very much in love with John, and her idea of the country was Leith Hill, or Pangbourne on a nice hot summer's day.

John went in search of their working paradise. He found it in Sussex, in the shape of a red-brick cottage on Heathfield Down, with an orchard and the remnants of a poultry farm.

John rushed back to Kitty in Kensington.

"I've found it."

"On, splendid!"

"Sussex. On a hill. Looks over the Downs."

"I love Sussex."

"It's a bit rough at present, but we shall have all the summer to get things ship-shape. We can buy in your stock and be ready for the autumn."

"Where just is it?"

"Heathfield Down. About seven miles from Hoveham. We can reach Brighton and Eastbourne. Maybe we'll have a little car."



KITTY had very dark red hair and a quick colour, and a temper that was apt to be as quick as her colour. John was solid and fair; with blue eyes that saw more than his tongue could tell.

Kitty was impetuous, and she went into the adventure on the impulse, without asking too many questions, and she and John were in the adventure together.

The little place was called Yew Tree Farm. It had a garden, an orchard of two acres, and seven acres of grass and moorland could be rented when John needed it.

Two old yew trees grew in front of the house, and between them was framed a picture of rolling woods and fields and the great grey vallum of the distant downs. The wind seemed, and so was life for John and Kitty during the months of summer. They were a pair of optimists.

They worked. John mended fences and built chicken houses and put up wire runs, and watched his stock of young birds grow.

Kitty had to cook and clean and make curtains and chair covers, though a woman came in once a week to scrub the brick floors of the kitchen, scullery and little dark old dairy.

But during those first months life was a bit of a picnic, a delightful business, and they loved each other and were well.

On Saturday afternoons they would get on their bicycles and ride into Hoveham, though Hoveham could not be described as a thrilling little town. In the middle of October the weather broke, and for the first week of this changed season Kitty wondered what had happened to life. It was as though the sun had turned off. The wind seemed to have a particular quarrel with Heathfield Down. Rain blotted out the hills. Yew Tree Farm revealed itself to Kitty in a new light.

There was mud. It was her first ex-

ting his boots at the back door, and brushing them with an old brush.

But there were other things. The cupboard in their bedroom glistened with a slimy wetness. The kitchen grate began to be abominably sulky, and it became a chilly business creeping down to light the fire. The kindling wood was damp, and the bricks cold.

Yew Tree Farm had no hot-water system. It was draughty and the doors did not fit. Chimneys smoked.

John came in one morning out of the early greyness called to her from the back door:

"Birds' breakfast ready yet, Kit?"

It was part of her business to heat up the birds' early meals, and usually she fed them at this hour.

able. The wind was the only thing that moved, and made a restless sound in the chimney, or rattled the doors and windows.

Kitty and John began to quarrel. It began with little snappings, little brusquenesses. Or they would sit silently, very conscious of the silence, observing each other with secret uneasiness. What had happened? A curtain of reserve and mistrust and misunderstanding seemed to fall.

Kitty yawned. She went about with an air of thinking secret thoughts. She would flash out at him suddenly. His very habits had begun to annoy her.

"Supposing you do the lamp for once. I'm sick of lamps."

called. John got on his bicycle and rode over to Hoveham. He made a purchase at a local ironmonger's and returning with his package of powder, hid it away in the tool-shed.

He spent the whole afternoon grubbing a hole under the butt of the old oak tree, but darkness came before he could lay his charge and improvise a fuse. He thought: "I'll do it first thing in the morning. Perhaps she'll understand that I do care."

They passed a miserable and silent evening, for Kitty had begun to be attacked by contrition, but not to the point of a confession.

She was so much aware of John's solemn, worried face, and of the way his eyes watched her. They went to

itself to Kitty in a new light. She discovered things. There was mud. It was her first experience of such mud. John brought it in on his boots. "Jack, just look." She protested. "Jack, just look." She was pained. Her forehead had a little crease in it. "Sorry." After that she would hear him scap-

It was part of her business to heat up the birds' early meal, and usually she fed them at this hour. "No, it isn't. Oh, drat this fire!" He forgot his muddy boots. He went forward into the kitchen and surprised her in a sudden. He was taking charred paper and sticks out of the grate. Her hands were dirty, and she had a black mark on one cheek.

She stared at him. "You might have had a decent grate put in here. It's absolutely filthy. It's gone out twice." "What about the wood?" "Oh, damn the wood. It's all wet." He stood there looking down at her with a serious, troubled air, and suddenly she turned on him. "Don't stand and stare. Can't you get me some decent wood? And look at your filthy boots." Guiltily he glanced at his feet. "Sorry, Kit. I forgot. I'll go and break up a box."

ildren like Diploma so much: I or them."

na: "Oh! decidedly. Diploma prepared by a special process that takes all traces of sugar so that the weakest digestion can enjoy without its goodness."

So he went out thoughtfully, leaving her on her knees before the smoky grate. But that was only the beginning of things, the sudden rush of reality into their young lives, the ending of an easy dream. A country cottage in winter, miles from anywhere, is not a place to dream in. Kitty woke up. The illusion had vanished, and during those winter days a spirit of discord seemed to enter into her, discord and discontent.

It was a phase that many young things have to face, but Kitty faced it with an angry sulkeness. She longed for London and the lights, and the buses, and the easiness of a great city; she felt somehow life was a swindle. She let herself go.

Even John had lost some of his glamour. He looked rough and untidy and tired. He seemed to have nothing to say.

And those evenings! They used lamps, and Kitty had to keep and clean the lamps, and they, too, were cursed.

But when you had lit the lamp at half-past four and drawn the curtains, nothing happened. Nothing could happen. You just sat and yawned and washed up and yawned again, and listened, until the silence became unbearable.

says Mr. Peppercorn:

GEORGE Davis was telling us about a friend of his who was engaged to a girl. The boy and asked the lad how old he was. "The day before yesterday I was 14," said the boy, and the boy then told him he was afraid he was too young. "But I shall be 17 next year."



"Supposing you took the lamp for once. I'm sick of lamps."

HE was much gentler than she was. He wore a look of troubled, perplexed watchfulness. It was as though he could not understand the change in her. He had had to take life raw during the war, and after the trenches Yew Tree Farm was heaven.

"I want a holiday, Kit." "She was unreasonable, yet mercifully reasonable." "What's the use?" "You said—you'll have to come back here." "Of course." "But Kit—we chose it." "You did." "I see."

He began to see and he still hoped that she would get over her mood, but in a little while he realised that things were growing worse.

There was a witfulness in John's wife, a young selfishness that would never compromise nor surrender. She paraded a silly martyrdom.

She took to carrying out the hot meal for the poultry in the muck of the winter mornings, walking through the wet orchard to the field where the wooden houses stood. John protested. "You needn't do it, you know."

"Must do something." He went about silently accusing himself of having dragged her into this life which she loathed. He was spoiling marriage for her.

But what a tragedy! And there seemed to him to be no escape, for all his money was buried in this little place.

THEN their young anguish came to a climax. It happened in the strangest of ways. Five yards beyond the gate between orchard and field the stump of an old oak pumpped itself above the ground.

It lay almost in the path to the chicken house, and on two dark and successive mornings Kitty stumbled against it. She fell. She split a mess of hot meal down her dress. John heard her calling him.

"Come here." He went, and she flung the porringer on the ground. "I'm fed up. I've hurt myself, and you don't care."

"Kit!" "Look at that damned stump! A man with any gumption wouldn't have left it there. I'm sick of everything."

"I'm bored." "I'm sick of this place. We never do anything, we never see anybody; we're just buried alive." He stood with his hands hanging gazing at the mess of chicken food. Their lives seemed rather like that mess.

That morning, after the bigger had

She was so much aware of John's solemn, worried face, and of the way his eyes watched her. They were to be led in silence and neither of them slept a wink.

John got up very early, long before it was light. He took the candle from her mate, lit the candle beside the bed, and feeling restless rose and dressed.

Suddenly she heard the sound of an explosion. The door shook and the windows rattled. She started up. What on earth was John doing? And then she remembered the stump of the oak tree.

NEXT she opened the back door and listened. There was silence.

"Jack—Jack—what on earth are you doing?"

The silence continued, and in the greyness of the dawn she went down the rilled path. And suddenly she stood still.

She saw a figure among the orchard trees, a figure that groped and blundered blindly. She saw it strike the trunk of a tree and cling to the trunk. A cry came from it.

She ran. The whole of her ran, soul, heart and body. And in the greyness she became aware of his poor, ruined face, all blacked and bloody. She was terrified, but her terror found love behind it.

"Jack—my dear—what have you . . ."

His bleeding lips answered. "The old stump. Blowing it up. Thought the fuse had gone wrong. Went to look and the thing exploded."

"Can't see you, Kit. I'm—I'm blind. Oh, what a mess I've made of things for you."

His bleeding lips answered. "The old stump. Blowing it up. Thought the fuse had gone wrong. Went to look and the thing exploded."

"I'll go down to the mill. They have a phone there. I'll get the doctor."

For two days she suffered a relentless suspense, for when the doctor came John's face was such a pulp and the eyelids so swollen that it was almost impossible for the doctor to examine his eyes.

He spoke guardedly, and did what could be done, and came again twice that day. Next day was the same, but on the third day Kitty heard her husband cry out.

"Kit—where are you?"

"Here. What is it, dear one?"

"Kit, can see, hear eyes."

"Oh, my dear. My blessed one."

So John did not lose his sight, though he carried a scarred face to the end of his days and Kitty developed other vision. She had recovered compassion, that blessed virtue which youth lacks, and without which life is dust and ice.

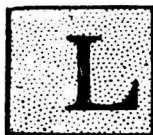
They stayed on at Yew Tree Farm. Happiness came to them there.

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Woman at the Gate



LONDON tormented him.

It was so tumultuous, so crowded, and somehow so new, and in its streets he was afraid to meet people who had known him in the days before his disaster.



He was staying at an hotel in Telford Square, and under an assumed name. The hotel knew him as Mr. Kyle; his real name was Stavely, Richard Geoffrey

Stavely.

The plane trees in the square were in young leaf, and Stavely, looking at them from his bedroom window, that most anonymous, dreary and unfriendly room, felt a sudden yearning in him for green spaces and solitude, some corner of the world where crowds did not gather. It was nine o'clock on a late May morning, and Stavely went down and spoke to the head porter.

"Can you get me a car for the day?"

"Certainly, sir. What time would you like it here, sir?"

"Ten o'clock."

"I'll 'phone at once, sir."

At ten the Daimler saloon was waiting outside the hotel. Stavely emerged, and the chauffeur, a neat, dark, brisk little man, threw away a cigarette and saluted.

"Good morning, sir. Where do you want to go?"

Stavely appeared to hesitate. He looked up at the plane trees.

"Oh, somewhere down into the

country, somewhere along the river. I leave it to you."

Surprising vagueness! But the chauffeur knew his own mind, and where he would be given the best meal in the home counties.

"What about lunch, sir?"

"I leave it to you."

They set off. The man at the wheel made for Staines, exhibiting to Stavely a streak of the new England, one of its new calcified arteries. They passed over Staines bridge, and on the Egham road was displayed the very latest thing in gasometers. At Runnymede, Stavely saw the Thames as he wished to see it, still and sleek and empty. It was for him a river of memories, of eternal fascination.

They travelled on until Windsor lay behind them. Then they were crawling through the congested main street of Maidenhead. The car turned to the right, and Stavely had not noticed the sign-post. He sat there with a kind of dreamy innocence.

Red villas, a pleasant sort of suburbia, but presently the country opened out. It spread green shoulders and drew a deeper breath. Stavely saw farms, old brick walls, gardens, cottages, a liver-and-white spaniel showing two eyes in a gateway. There were fields all yellow with buttercups, old thorn trees like snow, and in the sky great cumulus clouds.

Suddenly there were beech woods, greenish light, secrecy. The road fell steeply, looping down between the tall trunks. Stavely had been leaning back in the car, but he sat forward,

COMPLETE NOVEL

" 'I have been meaning to tell you. I felt it wouldn't be fair not to tell you. I've been in prison.'

Then he heard her voice.

'I—too—have been in prison.'

'You?'

He looked up into her face, and she nodded.

'How long were you in prison?' she asked.

'Three years.'

'I have been in prison longer than that,' she said. 'But how terrible of me! I ought not to—'

And suddenly he understood."

and his face seemed to sharpen. Surely, he remembered these beech woods?

The road straightened out. He saw a church spire cutting the sky, the redness of old houses, and the sudden whiteness of a bridge. The car slowed down, turned to the right, and rolled gently into the garden of the riverside inn.

Stavely felt a kind of contraction of the heart. What a coincidence! The fellow had brought him to the very place where he and his wife had spent their honeymoon!

II

HIS first feeling was that he could not get out of the car. He sat there as though paralyzed, staring at a particular green seat close to the water's edge. He could remember sitting on that very seat with Rosamund, and the swans had come to them to be fed.

The chauffeur had opened the door.

"The Bridge Inn, Marley, sir. Best place for thirty miles. Best cooking on the river. Shall I garage, sir?"

He intended Stavely to stop here, and Stavely, overwhelmed by sudden memories, got out of the car and stood looking at the river.

"Yes, all right, we'll stop here."

But what a coincidence! He wanted to be alone with it and his memories, for here in this inn he had spent one of the happiest weeks of his life. He sat down on a seat under a weeping willow. Four punts lay moored at his feet. He saw the curve of the water

By Warwick Deeping

as it slid over the weir and fell in a succession of little foaming scrolls over the steps. It made a moist, soft moaning that never ceased. A patch of green sedge waved gently, and he thought: "We got into a punt just here. We were in love then. Extraordinary! If someone had told me, then, that she would have thrown me over when the crash came—I should not have believed it. And she wouldn't believe that I was more sinned against than sinning. Masterman fooled us all. And she went off with Bates—Bates—of all men! Well, that's all over, and I'm finished."

He had five hundred a year, and a past. He had served three years in prison for the misappropriation of funds. They had given Masterman seven, Iles five. The case had been one of the year's scandals; it had even been dealt with in leading articles. Gentlemen had referred to it as an attack on the solid integrity of the City's business foundations.

Footsteps made a shuffling sound on the gravel. He found a very old waiter standing beside him.

"Taking lunch, sir?"

Woman at the Gate

Here was another ghost, holding a menu card, but the ghost did not recognize him. Like a mechanism moved by a spring, he put out his hand for the menu.

"Yes. No soup. Salmon will do. And bechamel of chicken. Could I have a sweet omelette?"

"Certainly, sir."

YET another coincidence. In the dining-room old George showed him to the very same table, one in a corner with a view of the weir. He sat down. He had a queer feeling of being both alive and dead. Did Rosamund ever come here now with that fat fellow, Bates?

He unfolded his napkin.

"Anything to drink, sir."

"Yes, bring me a bottle of beer."

After lunch Stavely went out and wandered. He found a path going down past some boat-houses, and he followed the path along the river. On this day in May, though the river itself was empty, the world seemed to swell with the joy of life. The beech woods on the hills were like green clouds. He saw yellow water-flags in flower in a backwater, and a grove of old thorn trees breathed their scent upon him.

He walked a long way, passing through gates and climbing stiles, and presently he sat down in a meadow where cows were grazing. Five Lombardy poplars raised spires of pale and greenish gold. He looked across the river and became aware of a funny little house tucked away among trees like a jewel in a case lined with green velvet. Its garden came down to the river, and on the river bank a white notice-board read: "To Let."

Stavely sat and looked at this cottage. It was of old, red brick, and it had two dormer windows in its roof and a white door under a white pillared porch. On the right two huge chestnut trees, growing close to the river, made a great green cave with the black water for a floor. There was a boat-house with faded blue doors under the chestnut trees.

The place fascinated him. He and the house seemed to address each other across the river.

"I like the look of you."

"Well, I'm to let."

"And I'm a broken man, a kind of outcast. You are just the sort of little place for a solitary soul. You look so peaceful."

"Well, come and take me."

"Why not?"

Yes, why not? If he asked for solitude, here was solitude: the river, the meadows, placid cows. He could play the recluse in this cottage by the river, cook his own food, make his own bed. How consoling to have simple things to do after the dreadful and parasitic ennui of an hotel. He stood up. He could read the name of the house agent on the board, a firm with an office at Marley. He walked back to Marley, and found the firm's office half-way up the old red High Street.

A pleasant young woman received him.

"I see you have a little house to let on the river."

He explained the place to her.

"Oh, yes, The Hermitage."

"I would like to have a look at it. Could I have the keys?"

"Certainly."

"What is the rent?"

"Eighty pounds a year."

"It seems rather a lot."

"Well, you see, sir, it is quite reasonable in these days, especially for a little place that is away from the main road. Lots of people are ready to pay for peace. No motors."

"But there are motor-boats on the river."

The girl smiled.

"Not at night, sir; and never very many on these reaches."

She explained to him how to reach The Hermitage, and he thanked her and took the keys. He had to cross Marley Bridge and follow a lane that ran between high hedges and under the shade of elms and beeches, and presently he came to a high, close-boarded fence, black with many tarrings. On the gate a slip of wood

showed in white letters those two words: "The Hermitage."

He went in and explored. The garden had gone wild. There were fruit trees, box hedges, two or three old yews, brick paths winding here and there. A few late tulips were flowering amid the docks, groundsel and chickweed. A big rosemary bush was tinged with blue. Towards the river an uncut lawn sloped gently, and on this May day the wild, green tangle of the place delighted him.

He unlocked the white door and went over the house. That, too, pleased him. It had a kind of gentle sadness. The sunlight streamed in on its bare floors. He stood at a window and looked across the river. He saw the meadow in which he had sat, the cattle, a row of old thorns all leaning one way, and to the left an avenue of old poplars. In the distance, two or three stacks suggested a farm.

The avenue of poplars came right down to the river and ended in a white field-gate. Someone was leaning against the gate, a woman in a yellow, knitted coat. She, too, was looking across the river, and her figure was as still as the trees. She wore no hat, and her hair was very dark.

When Stavely went out into the sunlight, he had decided to rent "The Hermitage." He would buy some simple furniture, and fit up a bedroom and a sitting-room and the kitchen. He walked back to Marley and told the girl in the office that she could put the business in hand.

III

THE woman in the yellow-knitted coat turned away from the white gate and walked slowly up the avenue of poplars. A backwater flanked the line of trees, suggesting one of those dykes in Flanders that are like long, black mirrors reflecting the trees and the sky. The avenue led to the home paddock of Beach Farm, and Rachel Parris unfastened the catch of the paddock-gate and let it close behind her with a clang.

She had unhappy eyes. The clang of the gate reminded her that her husband was always raging about gates being left open and cattle made to stray. "Fools from London, the motoring crowd, idiots in punts." She supposed that he had some reason for his rages, and that the life of a farmer in these days could be a sordid and angry struggle against circumstance and cities. And the life of a farmer's wife, in a lonely place, without children, cooped up with a savage who thought of nothing but the soil!

She walked slowly across the grass. She could remember a time when life had been so different. Even the house was different now, and she saw it as an ugly, flat-faced building with a slate roof, mock Gothic gables and shallow windows. The red paint on the barge-boards was wearing thin. They could not afford new paint. And every green thing had been stripped from the house: ivy, honeysuckle, roses. The brickwork had been coloured with an ochre colour-wash. That—was utility.

The garden was neglected. She had given up her struggle with the garden. Gardens did not pay. The life of Beach Farm was all milk, mangelwurzel, pigs, cake. John Parris was one of those ex-officers who had come back from the war and put his everything into the farm. He had put himself into it. He was the farm.

She did not go in by the front door. She hated that beetroot-coloured door with its cheap, black knocker. The Parris's lived in their kitchen, and Rachel passed along a stone-paved passage where an old hat and a cap, a white mackintosh and a blue scarf hung on pegs. She opened a door and stood looking in. The room within had a mustiness, a room that had lived in the days of her illusions and now was as dead as they were. She had spent so much of herself upon the sitting-room, with its flowery sofa and curtains and old furniture and china, and now no one ever looked at them.

She entered the room and sat down for a moment on the sofa. She noticed the dust on the gate-legged table.

Woman at the Gate

Did it matter? It happened to be her birthday. Supposing she were to write with her finger on that dusty surface—"Rachel Parris, born May 23rd, 1900." She was thirty-two years old.

And life was slipping away from her in this silent house, and sometimes the silence was so heavy that she would stand and listen for those other noises, the lowing of cattle, hens clucking, even the grunting of pigs. The song of a blackbird hurt her. For Beach Farm was all savage and mean utility, and she wanted beauty, and love and children. She was thirty-two years old.

He had forgotten her birthday. He had forgotten it for the last three years. She rose, and closing the door, passed into the kitchen, for she had the tea to prepare. They kept no maid; he was too mean now to allow her a maid. She filled the kettle and lit the oil stove, and collected cups and plates, bread, butter, jam. She sat down in one of the old basket chairs to wait for the sound of his footsteps.

He came. She heard him kicking the toes of his heavy boots against the step, the creaking of the pump-handle in the scullery, the splashing of water. He entered without a word, head thrust forward rather like the head of a bull. She had watched him growing more and more like his beasts. He was unshaven and in his shirt sleeves. And twelve years ago he had been a personable man, an officer and ex-public schoolboy who had kept himself clean.

She rose to make the tea. He did not look at her, but sat down at the table, and reaching for the loaf, cut two coarse slices. She poured out his tea and passed him the cup. He grunted like an animal.

She watched him eating. He dealt with his food as though in a hurry to get back to his work, piling butter and jam on chunks of bread, and something cried out in her, pity for him, pity for herself. She saw him becoming more and more like some beast harnessed to a pole, going round and round and trampling on life.

She had to speak. She broke the

silence as she might have broken a mirror that showed her a disfigured face.

"It's a wonderful May this year."

His blue eyes stared at her. He went on munching.

"Too damned dry."

He was thinking of the feed in the meadows, and of his hay crop. Yes, that was right and inevitable, but could he not sometimes think of other things?

A little streak of anger glowed in her.

"Do you know what the day is?"

"Thursday."

"Yes, and my birthday. You have forgotten it, and you have forgotten how old I am."

He glanced at her suspiciously. Was she suggesting that he should buy her something?

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"That's nothing in these days."

Again there was silence, and she knew that he was in a hurry to finish and escape. They mistrusted each other now, and she knew that he despised her discontent. Moods! Sob-stuff! A silly, sentimental fool who could not be satisfied with good bread and butter. He gulped a last mouthful of tea and pushed his chair back.

"More muck to move."

She felt that he had chosen those words just to flout her. She watched him go out. Somewhere in one of the fields a cow was lowing.

IV

WHERE the backwater and its avenue of poplars joined the river a wooden bridge carried the path across the dyke, and a white gate kept the cattle from straying from field to field.

Rachel came almost daily to this gate. It was to her like a window in a wall through which she could look at this other world, the life of the river and the coming and going upon it. She would rest her arms upon the gate and escape for the while from the silence and the loneliness. In the punts and boats she saw people who were happy, people who had come out to play.

The house across the river and its various occupants had been a source of interest to her. She had known it for years, and she had given it a name. She called it "The Doll's House," and in a sense it was her doll's house, and some of the dolls had been very quaint and amusing. She could remember a pair of very fat dolls who had been partial to brilliant bathing dresses and had decorated the lawn with two blobs of colour. They had been followed by a dark young man and a girl with red hair who would come running down to the river in a bright green costume, singing and waving a towel. Fragments of their conversation had drifted to her across the river.

"Ho, Boy, bring along the beauty-box, will you?"

Sometimes they had sung together, accompanying the gramophone on the lawn.

"Why do I love you?
Why do you love me?"

They had tantalized her those two young things, but she had grown rather fond of them and had christened them Pip and Squeak. Then the Doll's House had fallen on empty days, and it had had a shut-up and melancholy look through the winter, with dead chestnut leaves being blown about the garden and catching in the hedges.

Now, this June, the Doll's House was alive again, and this new doll was a solitary creature. She saw him going about in grey flannel trousers and a tennis shirt. He worked in the garden. She saw him cleaning out a punt in the blue-doored boat-house. She supposed that eventually some other figure would join him, but he remained solitary, and she was surprised.

She christened him "Mr. Strange."

Her glimpses of him were fragmentary, and yet she felt that his figure would become as familiar and distantly friendly as all those other figures.

As for Stavely, suddenly absorbed in the new domestic picnic, and acting as his own cook and housekeeper, he was for the first week multifariously busy. The new furniture had to be arranged, stores laid in, the grocer,

butcher and milkman interviewed. He lived for some days on tea and tomatoes and sardines and boiled eggs, bread and cheese, and jam roll bought at Marley. He attempted the cooking of a chop, and realized himself as the amateur. Dish-cloths became suddenly odoriferous and greasy. He was always needing hot water. Dirty plates and cups challenged him to wash them up. Even the making of a bed was not so easy as it seemed.

HE punted, he bathed, he gardened. He was not very conscious of the passing of time. A Tuesday was not distinctly Tuesday, though Sunday had a soul of its own, because no tradesmen called, and the Marley church bells rang, and he saw more life upon the river. Also, he was becoming aware of that figure that came almost daily to the white gate, and was just a figure in the landscape, and yet, somehow, more than that. He began to watch for her and to wonder about her. He would see her yellow coat come flickering between the poplars. He thought that he had never seen anyone walk quite as she walked, with an easy, sailing glide.

Where did she come from? Did she belong to the farm whose stacks and chimneys showed above the willows? Why did she suggest sadness to him?

For, after all, she was just a figure in the landscape. She stood and looked across the river. She seemed as solitary as he was.

He began to watch for her coming. The river separated them, and he supposed they would continue to be two strangers looking at each other across the water.

As for the river, it would not suffer him to be wholly a recluse. Youth invaded his world. It appeared in a punt at the bottom of his garden and hailed him as he lay in a deck-chair reading a book.

"Excuse me, sir."

He looked at youth, two young men and two young women, with gramophone and tea-basket and a wonderful collection of cushions. One of the

Woman at the Gate

young men was standing up and holding out a kettle.

"Excuse me, sir, do you happen to have any boiling water?"

He was a pleasant youth, and he explained to Stavely that their wretched stove had gone on strike, and that they could not make tea without boiling water. Obviously so. He had a most engaging smile, and Stavely got up and took the kettle.

"I think I can manage that for you."

The punt saluted him.

"I say—it's awfully good of you, sir."

"Frightful cheek of us asking."

"What a topping little place you've got, sir."

HE sent them off with the boiling water, and they poled their punt across to the willows on the northern bank. The whole party disembarked with cushions and tea things and laughter, and prepared to picnic in the meadow. Someone started up the gramophone and topical music muffled the footsteps of the approaching farmer, Nemesis in a very bad temper and ready to be ruthless to creatures who might interfere with gates.

"Hallo, what do you think you are doing here?"

It was quite obvious what they were doing. One of the girls turned off the gramophone.

"Just—picnicking."

"Well, you clear out. Private property. We have enough trouble with your people, throwing tins and glass about, and leaving gates open. Get back into your punt."

It was a very truculent Parris, a veritable bull in a meadow, but the party attempted to argue.

"We're not doing any harm here."

"There's a path. It's a right of way."

"I'm not arguing with you. Clear out. I don't want the trouble of prosecuting you. Get a move on."

Stavely watched the affair and listened to it. The party appeared inclined to exert passive resistance. It resented this truculent interference.

"All right, all right. Supposing you send for the police!"

Parris stepped down to the punt and unfastened the rope that had been attached to a tree.

"Get a move on, or I'll send your punt adrift. Come on, get up."

Plainly there was to be no peace with such a person around, and the party surrendered and re-embarked itself and its belongings, while Parris stood on guard. Stavely was more than interested. He thought, "Nice fellow—that! Yes, a most pleasant person! I suppose he is the farmer? Is it possible that he and the woman of the white gate belong to each other? Is that why? He might have let the youngsters stop there for an hour."

He watched the punt move upstream. Parris remained there until it had disappeared, and then, walking to the white gate turned up the poplar avenue to the farm.

Stavely drew the obvious inference.

"So—that's her husband! Charming fellow to live with—I should think!"

A river steamer appeared. It was very full of humanity and cases of beer. An orchestra was playing, and two men wearing pink lamp-shades instead of hats, foxtrotted together on a piece of deck that was not much larger than the lid of an egg box. Another young man adorned with a minute straw hat that was kept in place by an elastic band, leaned over the rail and raising the hat, allowed the elastic to snap it back upon his head.

It was a very rude steamer, a facetious steamer. The young men bawled at Stavely.

"'Allo, gov'nor, all aboard for the booze."

Stavely ignored the challenge, and there was loud laughter.

"Don't disturb the gen'leman, 'Arry."

"Hi, bloke, why don't you put yer book down and get a girl."

A skiff followed the steamer, sculled by a fair young woman with a high colour and a very blue skirt. A stout, jocund fellow sat in the stern with a bowler hat on the back of his head—strange headgear for the river. Just

opposite The Hermitage, the girl caught a crab, a good and lively crab, and she lay on her back in the bottom of the boat.

Her swain exulted. He slapped his fat thighs, and roared. Gertie had caught a crab!

But Gertie was not pleased. She was a waitress in a London tea-shop, and ready with repartee.

Yes, life on the river was crude and strong to-day, and presently Stavely put his book down on the grass and discovered that the woman in the yellow coat had appeared at the white gate. Also, a family punt had pulled in close to the mouth of the backwater. It was full of father and mother and auntie and three small children. The woman in yellow appeared interested in the punt's population.

Now, Stavely did a quite improper thing. He had a pair of field glasses in the house, and he went in and turned those glasses upon Rachel Parris and the people in the punt. A very small child in blue with a head the colour of ripe barley was waving a flag at the pretty lady, and the pretty lady of the white gate was smiling at the child. It was the first time that Stavely had seen her face with such distinctness, and he was conscious of a kind of exquisite surprise in her dark glances, and the blackness of her hair. Her mouth and eyes had a tenderness as she smiled at the child. It was as though the woman in her desired to be the mother of such a child.

V

LIKE old Mother Hubbard, Stavely found that the cupboard was bare. He had forgotten to give an order, and the milkman had forgotten to deliver eggs. But eggs, and the omelette he had proposed to experiment upon? The suggestion was instant and obvious. A farm might be expected to provide you with eggs, and the inspiration was catholic.

He ran the punt out of the boat-house, and poling across, tied the craft

to one of the posts of the bridge at the mouth of the backwater. He set off up the avenue of poplars, and arriving at the upper gate, stood hesitating for a moment, surveying the farm house and its buildings. Well, he had a reasonable excuse for crossing the paddock, and he crossed it. He passed through the gate into that sad little garden where a few neglected roses were in flower. He knocked at the front door.

No one came, and he repeated the knock. The cheap, black knocker worked rather stiffly. There was a sound of movement in the house, footsteps. The door opened. He and the woman of the white gate looked at each other.

He raised his hat.

"I hope you'll excuse me, but I wondered whether you had any eggs for sale?"

"Eggs?"

Was he insulting her by proposing to purchase the produce of the farm? He hurried to explain.

"I hope you won't think me—rude—but my milkman . . . Yes, I live in the house over the river. I find I have nothing for supper."

He smiled, and she, too, smiled.

"That's rather tragic."

"It is. I do hope you . . ."

"I think we can let you have some eggs. How many do you want?"

"Could I have a dozen?"

"I'll see."

But there were only three eggs in the house, and she left him in the garden and went off with a basket to collect any eggs that she could find in the nest-boxes. The "colony" house had been moved from the paddock to the fourteen acre, and the path led her past the boarded fence of the stackyard. Above the top of the fence some dark object kept appearing and disappearing rather like a big black bird, and the phenomena puzzled her for a moment. She stood to watch it, and then the thing explained itself. Parris was cleaning out the stockyard, and the dark objects were wads of dirt tossed from a fork into the cart.

She walked on to the fourteen acre.

Woman at the Gate

Muck tossed into a cart ! Yes, that was his life, and for her it meant a kind of relentless, sordid rhythm. The fowl-house stood in a corner by a clump of willows, and there were just three eggs in the boxes. So, he could not have his dozen ; he would have to be satisfied with six.

SHE returned to the house and found Stavely leaning against the wall of the garden. She had begun to wonder about him even as he wondered about her.

"I'm sorry. I could only find three."

"You can't spare them."

"You can have the six."

"But that will run you short."

"Oh, there will be more to-morrow."

She went into the house with the basket, and added the three eggs to those she had previously collected. She reappeared.

"Have you anything to put them in ?"

He had forgotten to bring a basket.

"My pockets."

"Not very safe. I'll lend you the basket."

"It's very good of you. My name's—Stavely. Oh—by the way, what do I owe."

"Ninepence."

He found a sixpence and three pennies.

"I'll bring the basket back at once. I have a punt at the bridge."

"Well," she said, "if I walk down to the river with you it will save you coming all the way back."

What could be more reasonable ? Yet he was conscious of a little spasm of surprise and pleasure.

"Why should you trouble ?"

"It's no trouble."

They crossed the paddock together, and he held the gate open for her. Their eyes met.

"All this land belongs to you ?"

"Yes, my husband. Our name is Parris."

"That's an unusual name."

"We spell it with two r's."

"Is your other name—as French or Homeric ?"

She laughed.

"No, it comes out of the Bible. Rachel."

The leaves of the poplars flickered and rustled and the wind made a murmuring in the sedges. They came to the white gate and the punt, and Stavely took the basket from her.

"I shan't be a minute."

He got into the punt and poled across, laid the eggs on the grass and ferried back to the other bank. He held out the basket to her. And as he gazed at her he remembered that he was a recluse and an outcast, and that if she knew what he knew she might look at him askance.

"Thank you so much, Mrs. Parris."

She smiled down at him out of her sad eyes.

"It's nothing. Your supper will be safe."

He watched her walk back under the quivering shadows of the trees.

It was growing dark when she returned to the farm. She saw a light in the kitchen window, and it told her that Parris had come in from the yard. She had been wandering in the fields along the river, and she had put out no supper, for supper had ceased to be a formal meal and had become one of her husband's economies.

The curtains were undrawn and she could see into the kitchen. She stood looking in. Parris had lit the oil lamp that hung by a chain from the beam, and he was sitting at the table with his back to the window. He was in his shirt sleeves, collarless, and just as he had come in from the yard, save that he had kicked off his filthy boots. He was eating bread and cheese, but even while he ate his supper the business of the farm went on. She saw a sheaf of bills, and his milk-book and a ledger on the table, and while munching he bent sideways over the ledger. He scribbled figures on an old envelope.

Rachel went round the house to the back door, and entering, closed it gently. The door between the scullery and the kitchen stood ajar, and the slit showed her a hand turning the pages of the ledger. She knew that he

must have heard her enter, but he did not look up or speak.

She was aware of the stillness of the house and of a stillness within herself. She was in a mood to say certain things to him. She entered and stood by the table, but he did not glance at her, for he was adding up a column of figures on the back of the envelope, and suddenly she knew that she hated this man, though the new hatred and the old love struggled together.

She sat down and waited until his pencil had jotted down the totals.

"You don't tell me much now," she said. "You used to tell me."

He raised his head and a shadow moved upon the wall.

"Well, you're not interested, are you?"

"I was."

"Oh, were you? All you women want is a man who can pass out the cash. We pay our bills. That's good enough for me."

He got up and put the ledger in a little old safe that stood on a table in the corner. He slammed the door of the safe as though warning her that some things were best kept locked up, and crossing over he took a pipe and a tobacco-tin from the mantelpiece. Tobacco was the only luxury he allowed himself.

"Had your supper?"

"No."

"Better have some."

He filled and lit the pipe, and turning a basket-chair so that its back was to the light, he picked up a crumpled paper and sat down to read. The opened sheet hid his face from her, but she could see his two big, dirty hands.

"Jack, doesn't it ever strike you that I'm starving here?"

"Well, what's the matter now?"

"You think of nothing but the farm. Your days are full, and mine are empty."

"Got the house to look after, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, isn't that a woman's job, or are you one of the new sort?"

"Supposing I am one of the new sort?"

He lowered the paper with an irritable jerk.

"Oh, are you? One of the sentimental grumblers. Never satisfied. I can drag my inside out here, and you whimper——"

"I want certain things. A woman can't live on scrubbing floors."

"Can't she!"

He raised the paper again and sucked at his pipe, and then, with a burst of impatience, he flung the paper on the floor and faced her.

"No sense of reality, my dear, that's what's your trouble. You can't be content with plain bread and butter; you want chocolates and a motor-car and a new frock once a month. Well, in these days a farm doesn't produce that sort of thing. The silly devils in the towns squeal for cheap food. The land gives no mercy, and it gets no mercy. I've enough to put up with without your moods."

She walked to the window and looked out through its dark panes.

"Five years ago I had no moods."

"Yes, you were more sensible then."

"Then why should I have moods now? Is it all my fault? It's lonely here. I wanted children."

He picked up the paper.

"Kids! Well, haven't I told you often enough that we can't afford children? We just pay our way, that's all."

"The cottagers have children."

"Yes, because the blighters get 'em educated free and doctored free. And we have to pay for it all. It's no use your getting sentimental about it, my girl, facts are facts, and that's that."

He relit his pipe, and she began to clear his supper things away. She ate nothing herself. Her hunger was of the heart.

VI

IT was one of those overcast and windless summer days when the river ran like lead. There was not a boat to be seen on it.

Woman at the Gate

Stavely was mowing his lawn when the thing happened. Colonel Sandys, of Fonthill, up the river, possessed a red Canadian canoe and a chauffeur named Peters, and Peters possessed a small daughter named Polly. Polly was an adventurous child. She had escaped from her mother, made a dash for the boathouse, and unfastened the painter of the red canoe. She had seen Mr. Leonard Sandys kneel in the canoe, Indian fashion, and she wanted to emulate Mr. Leonard Sandys.

STAVELY paused to watch the child. She had drifted easily down stream, and becoming over-confident, she was preparing to stand up on her stocky little legs, and without sufficient respect for the canoe's centre of gravity.

Stavely saw her danger. Who was the fool who had let her out in that craft? He shouted to her: "Sit down, kiddie! Sit down!"

Polly sat down with an unexpectedness and an obliquity that made the canoe dip and heel over. She was in the water. Stavely also sat down, and pulled his shoes off. He was in shirt and trousers. The boathouse doors were locked, the key in the cottage, and he went in off the bank. The thing had happened in mid-stream, and when he reached the spot he saw nothing but a grey and glassy surface and the red canoe drifting downstream. He cast about like a dog looking for a stick, and then he became aware of a submerged whiteness and a blur of yellowish hair.

He grabbed the hair and made for the opposite bank. He touched bottom, and getting on his feet, lifted the unconscious and bedraggled thing that was Polly, and scrambled up the bank.

He was on one knee and placing the child on the grass when he heard the voice.

"Oh, my dear!"

She was down on her knees opposite him, and for one moment he looked across the child's body at her face.

"Yours?"

"Oh, no. Be quick. We must do something."

Obviously! But she did not know what to do, and her hands hovered and faltered. Stavely had some amateurish knowledge that fitted the crisis. He turned Polly on her face, got his hands under the middle of her small body and held her head downwards. He shook her gently as though emptying a sack, and water came out of her mouth. She gurgled. She began to splutter; her face grew red and turgid. There were other sounds of life, sneezings, coughings. The blue eyes opened.

Stavely had been trying artificial respiration. He dropped the two small arms and squatted and stared as though the crisis had passed beyond him. He did not know what to do with it. The woman did. She took the wet child in her lap. She made tender, soothing noises.

Polly roared.

Rachel bent over the child, comforting her, and Stavely squatted and gazed and wondered, though his eyes were more upon the woman than the child. He found her compassion exquisite and moving. Polly's outcry, dying down, became articulate.

"Horrid ol' boat. It wouldn't stand still. Who are you?"

And Rachel laughed, though her laughter was near to tears.

"I'm Mrs. Nobody. What's your name, Poppet?"

"I'm Polly. My father's shuver to Colonel Sandys."

"Oh, at Fonthill."

For an instant the child was forgotten. Those two looked at each other, the woman sitting on the grass with the wet child in her lap, Stavely kneeling. "How splendid of you," she said with a soft earnestness.

He was astonished. He had not been conscious of any splendour. Something had just happened, something human and impulsive and inevitable.

"Oh, I don't think so. Luckily I was in the garden and saw."

Did she really think it splendid of him? Would she think it so splendid

if she knew that he was an ex-convict ?

"I suppose we ought to get the child home," he said.

"Of course. Fonthill is on the other side. Your lane goes down to it."

He stood up. He felt the glow of a new pride.

"I'll fetch my punt across and take you both over. You'll see the child home."

"Yes, but how are you to cross ?"

He laughed.

"That's easy."

He slipped down the bank, struck out and swam across. In two minutes he was back with the punt. He steadied it against the bank and held out a hand to her.

"Shall I take the kid ?"

Her dark eyes held his.

"No, I can manage. But do go in at once and change."

"It's nothing."

"Promise."

"Very well—I promise."

VII

IT had been raining, but the sky had cleared and the evening was a wet splendour. Through a break in the clouds sunlight poured upon a drenched and sparkling world. She went out bare-headed with the glow of the sunset on her face, for all this beauty and drenched glory called to her, a world laughing after tears.

She passed under the poplars. A little, errant wind came and scattered the moisture from the leaves, and the drops fell upon her, and she spread her hands and lifted her face. She saw the gleam of the river. The sunset had thrown a loop of golden lace across it, and beyond it the high woods were all blue and smoking.

She came to the white gate. The blue doors of the boat-house were open. Staveland was mopping out the punt. She watched him and wondered about him. Why was he so solitary ? And then she noticed something that piqued the woman in her. He had rigged up a clothes line at one end of the lawn and upon it hung a shirt, a pyjama suit,

two towels, socks and a collection of kitchen cloths. So he did his own washing, and he had hung it out to dry on a wet day like this ! It touched her.

But he had discovered her. He raised a hand, put the mop away and pushed the punt out. It came gliding across to her, but before it reached her bank he had begun to speak.

"I've had a visit from Polly to-day."

"She's none the worse ?"

"No."

"And you ?"

He looked up at her shyly.

"None the worse. It was a regular deputation, mother and father and child. They want to present me with a medal."

"Well, you were splendid."

He smiled up at her and leaned upon the pole.

"I only just did what anybody else would have done."

She nodded. Already there was a mysterious and secret understanding between them. Her spirit consented and was glad.

She looked across the river.

"Your poor washing won't dry—will it ?"

He laughed.

"To-day was washing day. I hung the things out before it began to rain, and forgot them. So I thought they might just as well stay there for the night."

"Do you do your own cooking, too ?"

"Yes, if you can call it cooking. I can manage scrambled eggs and sausages, but I haven't had much success yet—with roasting. But it's all rather fun."

To-night there was boyishness about him, and it made her wonder why he lived here all alone. Had he no work to do ? But perhaps he was an author or an artist ? And did it matter ?

She spread her arms on the gate.

"Isn't it wonderful to-night ? Everything seems alight, burning."

His face had an indescribable, dim shyness. He, too, was alight.

"Yes, wonderful. And yet—there

Woman at the Gate

is something that hurts one in beauty, if you know what I mean ? ”

She nodded.

“ Yes, I know. When a blackbird sings, and you feel lonely. ”

MEANWHILE, at the farm, life and a clearing sky had shared in realism and utility.

Parris stood and cursed.

“ Yes, you blasted little fool ! Thought I wasn't up to your tricks, did you ? ”

He stood just inside the gate of one of the yards, and the creature whom he was cursing slunk by him with a furtive, upward snarl. The lad was carrying two buckets of pig-meal. He had one of those shoddy little faces that are seen in slums and decaying villages, a senile face with a mouth that slobbered. His miserable arms were like crooked sticks to which the buckets were hung.

“ I ain't yer blasted fool. ”

He snarled defiantly, yet he was afraid.

“ Get on with the job, damn you, ” said Parris.

The lad's pale eyes flickered. He crossed the yard, knowing that he had been caught and badly caught emptying pig-meal down a drain, partly out of spite, partly to avoid carrying the whole of it to the beasts who squealed in an ecstasy of hunger. Moreover, the land and reality had taught Parris that there were many men who had to be shouted at.

The lad plodded back towards the food-store, swinging the empty buckets. He tried loutish bravado.

“ Shan't be yer blasted fool after Saturday. ”

He showed Parris a set of dreadful teeth.

“ All right, my lad. If you want fourteen days in quod, that's good enough for me. I've been waiting for you. You've been going home with eggs in your pocket. Let's have a look at that jacket of yours. Yes marked eggs. Bob marked them. ”

The lad's face took on a pinched, scared look. His bravado faded away.

“ I only took two, Mr. Parris, because my mother's ill. ”

“ You little thief—if I catch you again, you'll be for it. ”

Carrying his coat over his arm Parris made his way to the house. He went through the usual ritual of scraping his boots, working the pump-handle and washing his hands. He passed through into the kitchen, and saw the tea-things still on the table. He was angry.

“ Damn it, no supper ready. ”

He threw his coat into one of the basket chairs and shouted.

“ Rachel, hallo ! ”

The silence of the house seemed to deride him. He moved to the window and his glance grew fixed. He saw his wife coming through the gate at the end of the poplar avenue, and she seemed to linger there, looking up at the trees, and her dawdling irritated him. He opened the casement and shouted.

“ Forgotten the time ? What are you mooning about down there for ? I want my supper. ”

His voice rasped the silence. He saw the quick lift of her head, and the way she paused there for a while as though in protest against his bawling at her. She came slowly across the paddock like a woman walking with her secret self. He turned from the window, picked up his coat and put it on, and grabbing a box of matches, lit the oil stove. What a long time she was coming in ! These damned moods of hers ! Then, he heard her footsteps, soft and deliberate, and somehow baffling. He felt that a stranger was coming into the room, and pushing one of the chairs aside with his foot, he raised the chimney of the hanging lamp.

They did not look at each other.

“ I'm sorry I'm late, ” she said gently.

Her gentleness both perplexed and angered him. The lamp chimney fell back with a click.

“ All right. What's for supper ? The usual ? ”

“ There is some cold beef if you want it. ”

"Right. That'll do."

He sat in a chair by the window while she laid the table. He did not ask her where she had been.

Suddenly he began to talk, bitterly and savagely, and his dumbness had become so habitual that she looked at him for an instant with secret suspicion.

"Caught that young brute at his tricks. Pity you can't half kill a lout like that."

"What, Fred?"

"Yes."

"But he's such a poor silly thing."

He stared. Was she crossing him on purpose?

"He's sly enough. Caught him emptying the pig-meal down a drain. And he's been thieving eggs."

She smoothed the cloth.

"Why not get rid of him?"

He gave a jerk of the head.

"And get a lout who is just as rotten."

He broke into a diatribe against the post-war workers. They were a lot of loafing rotters sodden with Socialism. What could you do on the land with a crowd like that? She listened in silence, and it exasperated him. She was sulking.

"Oh, all right. You don't care a damn, do you?"

They sat down together at the table, and the lamp made a little flickering noise. Somewhere out there in the dusk an owl hooted.

VIII

STAVELY was greatly troubled.

Should he tell her? How could he tell her? For, already he had begun to fear the loss of the little that he had, this refuge, this strip of peaceful water, the tall poplars, and his daily vision of her at the white gate. Woman had pushed back the branches and surprised him in his secret wilderness. He had thought that he could sit by the river and watch its life without allowing himself to become involved in it, and the river had taught him that he was man.

But—surely—he would have to tell her? And if she could feel such compassion for a drowning child, she might discover pity for a man who had been submerged.

He had been tying up some of the overgrown Rambler roses, using an old box as a perch. Would he see her to-day? And looking across the river he saw that she was there. She stood leaning against the gate. The stillness of the summer evening shared with her its sense of secrecy. Swallows skimmed; a few bubbles rose, and under the two big chestnut trees the leaves and the water played the game of light and of shadow.

He waved to her, and her hand answered his. He seemed to hesitate. He moved his box to another place as though he meant to continue his work upon the roses, but he did not mount the box. He strolled with a casual air towards the boathouse. The two blue doors swung open, and through the dapple of light under the chestnut trees the nose of the punt came gliding.

He poled slowly across, and bringing the punt to the bank he held it there with the pole. He made no attempt to land, nor did she move from the gate, but stood there above him, looking down.

"May I talk to you for a little while?" he asked.

She smiled. It was not much to ask. She let her chin rest upon her cupped hands, and he stood still and waited, feeling that this silence linked them together.

"Any more visits from Polly?"

"No."

She looked out over the river, and her mood was serious.

"Sometimes one wishes that one could be a Polly again. But then, it would mean, wouldn't it, that one would have to begin all over again? And that—might be—"

His head lifted for a moment. Almost she might have been giving expression to his own thoughts.

"Beginning again! Perhaps—another failure. More muddle and misery."

Woman at the Gate

Her eyes met his. There was surprise in them, a question.

"You understand that?"

He nodded.

"Oh, yes, failure. It makes one afraid of taking risks, especially the greatest of risks. But you? Surely, you can't say——?"

She smiled faintly.

"Oh, yes, I'm a dreadful failure. I have not done the things I wanted to do. I'm not—what I wanted to be."

Her gaze seemed to pass over and beyond him. Her face had a strange, deep sadness.

"Then—we are both failures."

"You, too?"

"Yes, a very dreadful failure. Hasn't it occurred to you that a man who lives alone in a little place like that——?"

"No, it hadn't occurred to me. I thought——"

"Yes, go on."

"I thought you might be an artist or an author."

He gave a little laugh.

"One of the queer people! Yes, I'm one of the queer people, all right. I have been meaning to tell you. I felt it wouldn't be fair not to tell you. I've been in prison."

He did not dare to look at her face, and his gaze rested upon her feet. There was silence, but he heard the river in the sedges, and the clock of Marley church striking the hour. Almost, he expected to see those feet of hers draw back from the gate and carry her away from him under the trees.

Then he heard her voice, and it was gentle and deliberate.

"I—too—have been in prison."

"You?"

He looked up into her face, and she nodded.

"How long were you in prison?" she asked.

"Three years."

Her lips moved as though she were counting.

"I have been in prison longer than that," she said. "But how terrible of me! I ought not to——"

And suddenly he understood. He

wanted to touch her gently and tell her that he understood.

"I think I know. When—you can't be yourself—when life's all wrong. I'm most awfully grateful to you for telling me. It helps me—somehow."

She knew that he was wanting to ask her something more.

"Would you let me tell you how I crashed? I don't want to justify anything."

She nodded.

"Yes, tell me."

HER stepping down into the punt was deliberate. Stavely steadied it with the pole and put out a hand to her. Her eyes were curiously tranquil, the eyes of a woman who stepped calmly over the edge of some crisis.

"There are no cushions. I'm sorry. I'll get some from the boathouse."

As he poled the punt across, he wondered whether she was being kind to him or whether she needed and desired his kindness. He understood that her prison had been a house of unhappiness, perhaps even more so than his. But how unexpected it all was! The river was fate, and they were adrift upon it.

He ran the punt into the boat-house, and collecting some cushions, knelt and arranged them for her.

"That all right?"

"Yes."

The water under the chestnut trees was black and green and gold.

He stepped back into the punt.

"Upstream or down? Which shall it be?"

"Not Marley."

"No."

They did not want to be with the crowd.

He poled slowly upstream, and as he handled the dripping pole he wondered how he should begin to tell her. She was a noiseless, waiting presence near him. He kept the punt moving within a few yards of the bank, and his eyes seemed to fix themselves on the line where the green growth met the water.

He heard himself speaking, and it was like listening to the voice of another man.

"Things happen so strangely. Life can be rather like drifting in this punt. Everything's calm, and suddenly—you strike a weir. That's how it happened to me. I was in a big concern in town, as a junior partner. Our chief was one of those masterful men who create either a great success or a sensational scandal. He led us all by the nose. We had tremendous faith in him. It is rather terrible when your faith in people goes."

He paused for a moment with the pole trailing in the water.

"I knew that he was up to the eyes in all sorts of adventures—but I never suspected. He kept some of the big things so much to himself. One day he called two of us into the office. He made a confession. The firm was on the edge of a whirlpool. We should be sucked in—unless. He made a certain proposal. He wanted to do the bold and the desperate thing, and if the luck was with us—we should come through. He argued—that it was worth the risk—in order to save hundreds of other people from tragic loss. I was—well—scared and shocked. One does think of oneself, you know, of one's wife and future. I asked him to give me twenty-four hours, but he said that the decision had to be instant. In twenty-four hours the position might be hopeless. I gave in. I let him persuade me. Well, we crashed, and not until we had crashed did I know what a superman he had been in the matter of financial roguery. We crashed to the tune of a million or more. There was a small panic in the city. The Press . . . Oh, well, the Public Prosecutor took the case up."

THE punt had drifted close to the bank. He grasped the bough of a willow and held it.

"Two of us went into the dock with him. We had to admit it all. And the public wanted blood. They gave him seven years. I got three. But that was not all. Someone whom I had

trusted threw me over. I suppose she felt bitter about the mess I had made. Well, that's about all there is to it. I've no job in life left, no place in the world of men. I have a little money, and I came down here. One has to try and recover some kind of philosophy."

She was sitting with her knees drawn up and her arms clasping them.

"And have you found your philosophy?"

"Well, yes and no. I suppose I did a crooked thing, and took a crooked turning. I wanted to save myself, but it wasn't all self. I wanted to save other people."

"An impulse. Just as you saved that child."

He turned and looked at her.

"Thank you. That's generous of you."

"But isn't it true? Are not our impulses so strong at times that we are just—impulse. And such an impulse seems to justify everything."

He had shipped the pole and, still holding to the bough of the willow, he sat down in the bow of the punt.

"Then—I'm reprieved? I mean—you'll not cast me out?"

She lay back on the cushions and, looking up through the cloud of willow leaves, dipped her hands in the water.

"No, I don't think I should be strong enough to cast you out, even if I wanted to. Were you starved in your prison?"

"They did not feed us so badly."

"I have been starved in mine. I mean—the things a woman craves for, such innocent, simple things. But that's disloyal, and disloyalty's horrible."

He looked at her trailing hands.

"Yes, I know. And yet—I gave my partner her freedom. What else was there to do? Some disloyalties may be inevitable. But I suppose you could not tell me——"

"What?"

"The things you wanted—most."

Her hands moved gently in the water.

"Oh, yes . . . I think I could tell you

Woman at the Gate

that. There is nothing to be ashamed of. I wanted children, or—at least—a child. And you see—the farm is my husband's child. The struggle to live may be rather savage on a farm. To him—the farm's everything."

Stavelly nodded. He was aware of her hands hanging motionless in the water.

"Economy. Everything rationed, even—one's feelings? I see. But how blind—the struggle to succeed can make a man. A balance at the bank—and a bankrupt comradeship."

They drifted downstream to meet the dusk, Stavelly guiding the punt with a paddle, and making an occasional stroke with it. The afterglow lay upon Rachel's face, and there was silence between them as though they had passed beyond the convention of words into another and more intimate world. And he sat and wondered. Was this the end, or but the beginning? They had confessed to each other, and after this confession would each return to silence and solitude?

Across the sheeted and silky blackness of the river he saw the white gate, and the tall trees making a darkness above it. He guided the punt to the mouth of the backwater, and grasping the sedges, drew it in. She had not moved, she had not spoken, and suddenly she rose and knelt on the cushions.

"I want you to realize that—your telling me has seemed as good as your saving of that child."

"You are generous."

"Oh, no, only a woman."

She got to her feet and stepped out on to the bank.

"I must go back—and think."

"Good-night, Rachel. Don't think too much. Does thinking get one anywhere?"

"Perhaps it is better to feel than to think."

"Perhaps."

They had been seen more than an hour ago by a man who happened to be crossing a meadow. He had slipped through a field gate and following the shelter of an old thorn hedge, had reached the river without their suspecting it. Rachel's yellow knitted

coat had been the object that had attracted Parris's attention. He had stood hidden by the hedge, watching them.

It was almost dark when Rachel reached the paddock gate. She had walked up the poplar avenue with eyes that saw and yet did not see. Her consciousness was an inward flame. She came quite close to the gate without being aware of the figure leaning against it.

His voice startled her.

"Where the devil have you been?"

She stood still.

"Down by the river."

"Just mooning about!"

"No, not quite that. Being myself."

He looked at her in the darkness.

"Oh, being yourself! I see. Well, supposing you come in and do some work."

He opened the gate, and she passed through it. She heard him let it fall to with a crash. She was both afraid and exultant.

IX

SIII! woke very early, and to a sound that was as constant and unvarying as the hubbub made by an alarm clock, the clank of the milk cans as they were loaded on to the float, and their jangling clatter as the cart drove off down the rough farm road. Each morning she heard the music of those cans, and sometimes she heard her husband's voice.

"Stand still, you brute!"

How significant it was, and what a comment on their own lives, that they had their own rooms!

The illusion that life on a farm would always be rich, wholesome and kind! But how sordid and silly it could be! She sat up in bed with the clothes looped over her knees, and the window-frame made a shadow pattern on the yellow blind. The sun was shining.

She slipped out of bed, and raised the blind, and saw the early sunlight on a green world. The metallic clamour of the milk cans was dying away. She confronted the strangeness and the

beauty of yesterday, that intimate
hour upon the river.

She stretched out her hands into the sunlight. They had been roughened by work, but from the wrists the skin was sleek and soft. She smiled. She was thirty-two, but did it matter? A sudden excitement possessed her. She dressed quickly, with an awareness of that stealthy sunlight and glistening dew. The whole of her consented. It saw an open window and escape, the beauty of loving and of being loved.

the edge of the bed and put on her shoes. How still everything was! She had an hour of freedom while he was away driving those milk cans to the station. She was in the garden, and an old cabbage rose growing in a weedy bed greeted her with five full blossoms and two buds. She paused to pick one of the buds, as though for her it symbolized the beginning of new life. She thought of the milk cans going to Marley station. How absurd! Thousands upon thousands of milk cans all pouring up to London, and here was this secret morning with the dew upon the grass.

She would go down to the river. Perhaps she would see him, and wave to him and send him her message.

"I have thought. I have felt. I am woman."

She was putting her hand to the latch of the field gate when she heard a voice shouting at her. She stood still.

"Hallo! What's on now? Come

and get busy. I want my breakfast."

She stood with her hand on the gate, conscious of sudden humiliation, of an interference that was rough and bullying. What right had he to shout at her like this? But her anger was mingled with fear. So he had not gone to the station this morning; he had sent one of his men. For a moment she hesitated. Supposing she was to disregard that voice, open the gate and go where she wished to go? But he was watching her, standing by a corner of the house, a pipe stuck in

his mouth, his hands in his trouser pockets.

She walked back across the paddock, and that strip of grass seemed interminable. She heard herself speaking.

"I object to being shouted at. I'm not one of your beasts—or a milk can."

He took his pipe from his mouth. He was watching her intently. She went past without looking at him, but she had a feeling that he might stretch out a hand and clutch her.

"My milk cans! And where the hell would you be without my milk cans? What about some breakfast?"

She passed on.

"I thought you had gone to the station. You shall have your breakfast, and don't swear at me."

She was angry and humiliated. Her pride gathered itself as though to resist some outrage. For the next few days she had a feeling that her husband was never very far away, and that he was watching her. He would appear suddenly in the house when he should

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Woman at the Gate

have been in the fields. She had a frozen feeling towards him ; she went about her work fastidiously, silent and apart.

Once, catching sight of his face as he came into the kitchen, she surprised him sneering at her. She hated him for that sneer.

It provoked in her a new recklessness. He had no more understanding of the proud and complex creature in his house than he had of a picture or a poem. He regarded her as a superior sort of animal who could be shouted at and driven, a cheap wife, more economical than a servant, and less free. She had no money of her own.

Her recklessness gathered strength. She found herself laughing, but what strange laughter ! And looking at the hills across the river ; so green and tranquil, she wondered why life could not be like that. But her recklessness and her pride struggled together. For three days she did not go down to the white gate.

On the Saturday he came in early and spoke to her as he worked the pump-handle.

"Push on dinner, will you. I'm going over to Redbury."

He went upstairs to change, and her recklessness gathered strength. She would be free for three hours. They sat down at the table together, and she noticed his dirty finger-nails, and the hair on his hands. He looked at her now and again with an air of oblique slyness.

He was gone, and she sat listening, letting herself realize this silence and possess it. She could be herself for three hours. She could go down to the river. . .

Half-way down the farm lane where the hedges broke back to a field-gate someone was waiting for Parris. She was sitting on the gate and drumming the heels of her shoes against one of the bars.

"Hallo, Maisie."

She had an impudent little face and very fair hair.

"Any news, Mr. Parris ?"

"What sort of news do you expect?"

She slipped off the gate and sidled

up on her long, slim legs ; her slanting blue eyes were sly.

"When's the job coming along ?"

"What job ?"

"Oh, you know. Milk-o, milk-o, and me—in a nutty little van."

He looked at her meaningly.

"Might be quite soon. Keep an eye on the farm, kid. These poachers about. See ?"

"Rather."

He made a grab at her, but grasped the air, for she danced away on her irresponsible, long legs.

"You'll miss your train, Jack. Good-by-ee."

He laughed.

"You young devil."

X

STAVEIX had spent three restless days.

He had placed his deck-chair in the shade of the chestnut trees, and he had a book on his knees. The river was the river of a Saturday afternoon on a hot day in July ; punts and skiffs were coming up from Marley, covering the river with little flecks of colour, and a sound of splashing and of voices. The river disturbed him. He kept glancing across at the white gate, and the shimmering poplars. He had not seen her there for three whole days, and he was troubled. Had he frightened her away ? Had her thinking ended in retreat ?

He turned a page, shifted his position in the chair, and glanced again towards the white gate. She was there. For some seconds he remained motionless, and then he dropped the book on the grass and stood up.

But the signal must come from her, and he waited under the shadow of the trees. He saw her raise her hand and make a little beckoning movement. He gave her no answering signal, but going to the boathouse, unchained the punt and poled out without looking ahead, and he became aware of a double sculler close upon him and a flurry of sculls and protesting glances.

"Look out, sir."

By Warwick Deeping

"You cut right across us."

A voice that was his said, "Sorry."

He was conscious of nothing but the figure at the gate. She might have been a thing of thistledown, some light and intangible substance that would suddenly float away. Her arms were resting on the top bar of the gate and she watched his approach with a sense of inevitableness. The nose of the punt came rustling among the water-flags and sedges at the mouth of the back-water. He looked up at her.

"I was afraid I had shocked you."

She gazed across the river.

"Was not my confession just as shocking? I am beginning to think that one can be too sensitive."

"You mean . . . one suffers too much?"

She nodded.

"One should be born a creature of brass with a voice of brass. One should move like a machine, without compunction, just driving ahead on one's own concerns."

"You don't really believe all that," he said.

She gave a whimsical smile.

"No, perhaps not. It depends upon the people one is with. But to be shouted at! The sentimental people say that there is something beautiful and consoling in contact with the soil, but then they forget that the soil may mean nothing to some people but muck and money."

He had begun to understand.

"The clay coarsens—man."

"And yet, it shouldn't. There is beauty in the fruits of the earth and the beasts of the field. But I'm getting Biblical. Let's look at the river and the people. They come out to play."

He smiled up at her.

"Let's belong to the river. Dare you?"

She looked at him intently.

"Yes."

"Well, come. You need not be afraid of me."

"I don't think I should ever be afraid of you."

An impertinent blonde head, bobbing up from a hollow under a thorn bush, saw the brown punt slanting across

the river to the shadows under the chestnut trees. It came to rest there where the dappled sunlight was reflected from the water to the leaves.

Parris, returning from Redbury, met Maisie Bishop at the same gate. They stood there talking, and Parris's face darkened as he listened to the girl.

"Look here, my lass, no tricks."

"Well, I'm telling you, that's all."

"Sure?"

"I don't squint, do I?"

He took her cheeky chin between thumb and forefinger.

"All right. People don't play tricks with me. See? You'll be hearing something from me soon. Now run on home."

Parris walked on, but he paused at another gate with the evening sun on his face. He saw cows grazing, and one of them came when he called to her and put her soft muzzle against his hand.

"Well, Pansy, old lady, we understand each other—anyway."

He caressed the beast. He and his beasts understood each other. They were part of the farm, of the sweet grass, the fragrance of crushed cake and hay, the warm smell of the byres. They shared with him his contact with the soil, and his simplicity, though they did not share the struggle and his ruthlessness. He lived in and on these hundred-and-fifty acres, thinking of nothing but ways and means, tolerant only of those who helped him and the farm. In his mirror of life he saw nothing but the darkness of things done and doing, primitive processes, the pouring of milk into a pail.

HE gave Pansy's neck a smack with the palm of his hand and went on towards the house. His eyes hardened into two blue pebbles. In his struggle with the soil he had brought the same ruthlessness into his human relationships. He was contemplating certain changes in the running of his milk business, and these changes coincided with the coming of this other crisis. There was in him more than a streak of cruelty, the ironical cunning of the

Woman at the Gate

sadist, the pleasure in putting an enemy to the torture. He would just try her, give her a final chance to stand by him and the farm.

The parlour window was open and he could see the back of the sofa and his wife's dark head. She was so deeply absorbed in her thoughts that she did not hear him cross the grass, and he stood and observed her. So, she used this other room when he was out of the house! There was a significance in her choice. Was it that she escaped from the kitchen and the smell of life that was his? Did she think that she could fool him?

He passed the point of a tongue over his lips.

"Hallo, airing the drawing-room?"

There was a quick movement of her head, a lifting of the shoulders.

"You startled me."

"Nothing startling about me, is there?"

"Have you had tea?"

"Hours ago. Nearly supper-time, isn't it?"

"It's ready."

He saw her in profile. He saw her stretch her arms and yawn. She was a woman hiding something, and that something was her secret self.

"Coming in at once?"

"In ten minutes. Just going to prowling round."

She rose from the sofa and, without turning, walked towards the door.

"All right. Supper in ten minutes."

When he came in to the meal he seemed to be in an unusually cheerful mood. He ate his food less like an animal in a hurry; he was even conversational, and she, being so used to his glum glare, wondered not a little. She had come to regard him as a creature without subtlety. At the end of the meal she rose to clear the table, and he lit his pipe.

"Got ten minutes, Rachel? I've something to talk about."

She had picked up the tray and was standing with her back to the light. Her silence waited upon him.

"I have a change in view."

"To do with the farm?"

"That's it. Sit down."

She replaced the tray on the table.

"I've always held that one ought to get past those damned middle-men, and be your own distributor. Of course, transport and a quick market is the trouble. I couldn't afford a motor-van before, but now I think I can manage it."

HE straddled the chair he had used during the meal, and with arms crossed on the back of it he explained his plan. Why should a producer rail his product to London when he could dispose of it himself at a better figure? He had been making inquiries, and nursing the neighbourhood, and there was a market handy. The people at the Bridge Inn and the Mitre were ready to be served, and there were all those new little houses and bungalows on the arterial road between Marley and Redbury. Dozens of them were advertising teas. He could increase his herd and purchase a van, in fact, he had the van on order. He would need a sterilising and washing plant, and bottles, but the thing was practical politics.

He bit at the stem of his pipe and watched her.

"There's the extra labour, looking after the plant and driving the van."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"A woman could do it. What about you? You always seem to be mooning about with time on your hands."

So that was it. She was very conscious of a critical pause, and of the jets of smoke his mouth emitted. But had he no sense of proportion? Did he think that she could deal with all the drudgery of the house and add to it this new task? She was aware of his stolid and ominously attentive face. The farm. Yes, it was always the farm, and he was proposing to involve her yet more deeply in a struggle that had ceased to be hers.

She made herself speak calmly.

"I couldn't do it—with the house."

"Why not?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

By Warwick Deeping

"Because there is a limit. I have only one pair of hands."

He was silent, significantly silent. He had made his cast to try her, and it had miscarried as he had expected it to miscarry. He got up.

"So that's that. Thought you might like the chance. I shall have to look round for somebody."

"Why not Fred?"

"A lout like that! No thanks. I'd prefer to take on a smart girl for the job."

He observed her as he moved towards the door. If that wasn't a pretty broad hint! If she was playing a game with him, he, too, could play at that sort of game. But she said no more. She sat with her hands lying in her lap, her face strangely set and sullen.

She was conscious of his surveillance. He left her her defences, but he walked round them with an air of dumb scorn as though to make her feel how flimsy they were. She had no money of her own, and no defence save secrecy, and there were moments when she loathed this secrecy.

Supposing she told him . . . supposing she stood and screamed at him.

"I'm through with you. I'm not your drudge. I have found another man. He could be kinder to me. Yes, you are always asking for realities. This is reality. I hate you."

Supposing she said that. . . . And then?

Her defences would be down. And what escape was there . . . unless . . . ? She might be trusting in a dream. Moreover, she was afraid of Parris; she knew that he was capable of strange violence. She felt that he could be the creature of one of those cold frenzies that can kill. Some sordid horror! She shrank from it.

She began to be afraid of the poplar avenue and the white gate and the river. She might betray herself to him, and for a week she did not go near the river. But she wrote a little secret letter, and posted it in Marley when she went shopping.

I have been so tied here. No, I would rather not explain, but perhaps you understand. Things aren't always so simple as they seem. Forgive me.

Parris had not spoken to her again of the new idea, but she had a feeling that it was becoming a reality. Some smart girl! Well, what did she care?

It had been raining and she walked across the fields into Marley. Parris had shouted at her, "Two ounces of the usual for me. Don't forget it." In Marley High Street she met Stavely. He had come to buy stores and tobacco. He met her dark, wet, glistening figure in the doorway of the shop.

She flushed up and looked frightened.

"You!"

"Shopping. Nothing else to do on a day like this."

He waited for her and they walked together in the rain up Marley High Street. By the Chequers Inn Rachel turned into Flood Lane at the back of the brewery, and the place smelt of the brewhouse. The lane continued itself as a broad path between a high, brick wall and the trees of Marley Park, and it was full of puddles in which the drops from the branches overhead made tiny splashes.

She was very silent. Her face was wet with the rain. And she was ill at ease with him and self-conscious because she was feeling that a woman's happiness could be so much at the mercy of men. Was he like all the others? They desired, they were satisfied, they disappeared. Or, having surrendered everything to a lover you became something less than a mother and perhaps a little more than a servant. She was feeling bitter.

"This is a field path, you know."

OBVIOUSLY so. They had come to one of those gates that used to be known as kissing-gates.

"But I'm not trespassing."

She explained to him that the part of the path that was public would take him down to the river, and that in order to reach The Hermitage he would have to walk all the way back to Marley Bridge. Her dark mood puzzled him. He did not understand that in her bitterness she was so afraid of being cheap.

Woman at the Gate

"But that won't matter. I have all the day."

He followed her through the gate into a field where all the panicles and plumes of the grasses were grey with the rain. It was one of Parris's fields.

"You mustn't come any farther."

She paused for a moment. Her face had a kind of sad and stubborn wilfulness, and he wanted to say to her, "What's the matter? What have I done or not done?" Or was it that she was afraid, and like many women, wished to turn back when the adventure promised to become too serious?

"Just what you wish," he said. "You can say what you please, but let's try and keep to reality."

Reality! It was the very word she dreaded, for the reality could be so very treacherous and cruel.

"That's just my reason."

He looked at her. Was this mood of hers real? Did it mean that she . . .

"I wish you weren't so unhappy."

She flushed up. The intimate touch was like a blow. Was it so obvious to him that she felt forlorn and humiliated and so mistrustful of life? Almost she was angry.

"Oh, well, what does one expect from people? It doesn't do to be sentimental. Possibly my partner's right, and that the only thing that matters is cash down."

"You don't believe that—really."

"Do you know me so well?"

"I think I know the real you. You are just pretending to be—what you dread being."

"And that?"

"Have I any right to analyze?"

"Go on."

"No, I can't—somehow. When we are hurt and the pain is bitter, we may say bitter things. But you're not bitter, not really. I can't help saying this."

Her face seemed to soften. She moved on.

"You may come a little way, as far as the next gate."

The path had narrowed to a mere track, and he followed her through the wet grass. He felt that he could

be explicit now that her sad and disillusioned eyes were not on him.

"The fact is, Rachel, you can't trust people any longer."

She was silent for a moment.

"Perhaps. But there is such a thing as being—cheap."

"You—cheap! That's unthinkable. But don't you know that you can trust me?"

She paused, and the sudden cry was drawn from her.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of a reality that might be so . . . You see, when life has given a woman one bitter shock. . ."

"Yes, I understand. You're not sure. If you could feel sure! If I could make you feel sure!"

They came to a place in the field where heavy rain and wind had laid the grass into green hollows. She stood looking at the grass, her eyes downcast, her mouth poignant.

"You may feel like that now. But in a year."

"I'm not a boy. I've suffered."

"Yes, that's true."

"Have I to prove it? How can a man prove it? By not being greedy and passionate, by asking for nothing, by just being there—like a friend?"

She looked at him steadfastly for a moment.

"Could you do that?"

"Try me."

"I will."

XI

THE boy propped his red bicycle against the wall of the house and knocked. He had come to the back door, and there was no bell. It was a blazing July day, and Rachel had left the back door half open for the sake of coolness.

"Mr. Parris. Any answer?"

"Mr. Parris is on the farm. I shall have to find him."

"Could I have a drink of water?"

She fetched a tumbler, filled it at the pump, and gave it to him.

"I won't keep you longer than I can help."

By Warwick Deeping

Rachel went in search of Parris with the unopened telegram in her hand. Not twice in a year did a telegram arrive at Beach Farm, and in the old days she would have opened it, but not now. She found Parris and one of the men in the ten-acre, hoeing roots, and the field rose to a beech-wood that was somnolent with the summer heat. The two men were knee-deep in the sea of glossy leaves, and about fifty yards away from her. She called to Parris, and held up the envelope.

"Telegram."

He tramped through the roots to the land's end, and along it under the shadow of a hedge, carrying his hoe like a gun. His forearms were the colour of tanned leather, and his face looked harsh with the heat.

"The boy's waiting."

He took the telegram and opened it, and she watched his face.

"Norah's ill." Norah was his sister.

"Seriously?"

"She wants me to go. Damn it—well—I shall have to go. I suppose I can get down to Glastonbury to-night. Look here, wire back, 'Coming,' and send the boy off. I'll finish my row and come in and change."

She returned to the house and, asking the boy for a form, wrote out the wire to her sister-in-law. Only twice in her life had she met Norah Parris, one of those women who should have been a he-goat, with an incipient beard, and dead blue eyes. And as she wrote she thought, "To-night, I shall be free." I shall have a whole day and a night to myself."

She sent the boy off, and a minute later Parris came in. He washed at the pump, and she listened to the familiar sounds.

"Rachel."

"Yes."

"I shall get back to-morrow. Damned awkward—just now. Where's that suitcase?"

"It ought to be under your bed."

He went up to change and she heard him moving in the room above. There was a kind of smirk upon his face. Yes, supposing she knew that he was baiting

a trap for her, that he had written to his sister and arranged the plot, the kind of plot that would appeal to a Parris. Norah had never approved of Rachel. Rachel had always been too good-looking in the opinion of that cold-eyed shrew.

PARRIS came down the stairs. He thought he was acting the part pretty well.

"Going to Redbury. Catch a main line train there. You might keep an eye on the men."

"Yes."

"And especially on that young lout, Fred."

He was gone.

A sudden sense of peace enveloped her. She went up to her room and her movements had a sensuous indolence. She opened cupboards and drawers and at her leisure chose the clothes she wished to wear, though she had not much to choose from. She stood in front of her mirror and looked at herself steadfastly, seeing both Rachel Parris and another woman. Her youth had returned.

Never had the world seemed so green and still in the stealth of the summer heat. As she traversed the avenue of poplars she had a feeling that the trees drew close to shelter her, gentle and friendly trees. The weeds in the backwater had grown so rankly that the water was a black thread lying in a deep green crevice.

She came to the white gate and saw one of the blue doors of the boathouse hanging open, the brown nose of the punt and a twirling white disc that was the head of a mop. She waited at the gate for a minute before Stavely saw her. She smiled to herself and raised a hand.

He brought the punt out and poled it across, and her dark and inevitable eyes watched him, and he—looking up at her—somehow sensed the significance of her as woman. Her impulse had ceased to flicker. It burned steadily.

His glance fell to her knees.

Woman at the Gate

"Somehow," he said, "I am afraid of you to-day."

She smiled down at him. "Are you? But does it matter?"

She was clearing away her breakfast things next morning when the second telegram came. She opened the envelope and read:

Staying another night. Back to-morrow.

She was aware of the sunlight and the stillness and a secret exultation. She went into the parlour, and sitting down at the little old oak bureau, she wrote a letter.

Reprieve. I shall be at the gate to-night.

She wandered out and down to the river, and seeing him in the garden she held up the letter and then—bending—placed it in a clump of sedge. He understood. The river was empty, and when she had gone he crossed the river and possessed himself of the letter.

I shall be at the gate to-night.

She was at the paddock gate before the moon rose. Trees hid the face of it from her, but where there had been blackness there was now quicksilver. She stood in the shadow, but above the tops of the poplars were bathed in light. She listened. The night was as windless and still as the day had been.

Stavely left the punt moored at the end of the backwater. The trunks of the poplars rose like the pillars of a temple, and he came to a place where the moonlight touched the grass. He was nearer to the upper gate than he knew, and was visible to her, while she remained in the shadow.

"Geoffrey. I'm here."

HE stood still for a moment, and then went swiftly to her. Her hands were over the gate.

"Oh, my dear."

"I did not think Fate would be so kind to us."

They held each other with the bars of the gate between them. They were silent. They trembled a little.

There was a movement of the air,

and a rustling of the poplar leaves, and the cracking of dead wood, but they did not hear the latter sound. Parris was standing within fifteen yards of them. He had made his way along the hedge where a belt of shadow lay on the grass. He stood for some minutes, and then moved silently back along the hedge, and reaching the lane, walked on to the house. He found the back door open and no lights lit, and he sat down in a chair and waited.

"I must go now," she said.

"Must you?"

"Well, just five minutes more."

The wind had died away. The trees were still.

"Are you afraid of me, now, Rachel?"

She hesitated.

"Not of you, but of other things."

"Let me come between you and those other things."

"My dear, I want to be sure."

"Of me?"

"Of myself . . . too. We're not two children, Geoff."

"I know. I won't vex you, my dear. I shall be there across the river. I'll wait. Yes, you must be sure. I'll make you sure."

She put up her face.

"That comforts me. Don't be impatient, dear. This is too good and beautiful a thing to be snatched at. You do understand me, don't you?"

"I do."

He stood at the gate and watched her cross the paddock, and then he went quickly towards the river, and his head felt as high as the tops of the trees. How exquisite life could be! This moonlight and quiet water and sleeping grass. Yes, he would wait until she was sure; he would not be greedy.

Rachel came to the door. It was half open just as she had left it, and utterly unsuspecting, she closed and bolted it, and suddenly she heard a sound. She turned sharply and, looking through the doorway of the kitchen, saw a man's figure outlined against the moonlit window.

"Who's that?"

She put a hand to one of the bolts

to draw it back. Then she heard his voice.

"What's the matter? Scared of your own husband?"

"You!"

"Just got back. Found it wasn't necessary to stay. Norah's much better. Where are the damned matches?"

She leaned against the door. She felt faint.

"I thought it was a burglar."

He laughed.

"Where are those damned matches? I only got in three minutes ago. Mooning about as usual, I suppose. What about some supper?"

She had to light the lamp and prepare a meal. All the while she was feeling breathless. She hated herself and she hated him, and this wretched secrecy. But did he suspect? She imagined that he was so utterly absorbed in the farm that he never troubled his head about other people's emotions. He had carried his suitcase upstairs, and when she heard his footsteps descending, something cringed in her, and she hated her own cowardice.

"What was the matter with Norah?"

He was laconic. He did not look at her.

"The doctors thought it was appendicitis."

"And it wasn't?"

"No."

She put a hand to her head.

"I'm rather tired. Do you mind if I leave you? I'll clear away in the morning."

"All right. Go to bed."

When he had finished his supper he lit a pipe and, strolling out, crossed the paddock to the field gate. He leaned against it and looked at his wife's window. His mood expressed itself in a grim smirk. So, she thought she was fooling him? Well, he would teach her a thing or two. She might play fast and loose with him, but she shouldn't play fast and loose with the farm. That was the one thing that mattered. He bit hard at his pipe. He was a fanatic in his devotion to his farm. He was capable of a dogged

and brutal cunning. Yes, he would teach her a thing or two. She should not know that he knew. He would have his revenge.

XII

RACHEL woke to the same sounds, the clatter of the milk cans, the lowing of a cow, the pother over the laying of an egg.

She heard her husband's voice.

"Get on with that hoeing, George."

She washed, dressed and went downstairs to take up the order of the day. She opened windows and lit the stove. She was busy with broom and duster. She had to clear away the remains of Parris's supper, and her movements were deliberate and tranquil. The life of the farm was going on as usual, and she could draw a breath of relief and suppose that he did not suspect. She hoped that he never would suspect, and that some day when she felt sure of her destiny, she would disappear. And he might miss her as a pair of useful hands . . . that was all.

She prepared breakfast. She cut four rashers of bacon and placed them in the frying-pan. She heard his footsteps in the yard, and she heard them without a tremor.

"Breakfast's ready."

Her level and dispassionate voice drew no answer from him. She heard him give a tug at the roller-towel. He came in, pulled up a chair, and reaching for the loaf, cut himself a slice. He did not look at her.

"Remember what I told you the other day about the milk round?" he said.

"Yes."

"I'm not wasting any time. The van's coming next week. I've engaged a girl to drive it and help in the dairy. Her name's Bishop. She is going to live here."

"Here?"

"Of course. She can have the back room. You'll have to feed her."

She was astonished. She wanted to protest.

"You might have told me before."

Woman at the Gate

"You had your chance, hadn't you? By the way, I shall want the sitting-room. I'm going to throw it into the dairy."

She observed him. He was eating as he always ate, like an animal in a hurry.

"What shall we do with the furniture?"

"Oh, shove it upstairs or sell it. Yes, I'll sell it."

HIS roughness threatened to override any possible protest. But she was not protesting.

"We shall want new sheets and blankets."

"Get 'em, and get 'em cheaply."

"I suppose the girl will look after herself."

"Not much. She'll have plenty to do. I expect you to manage. That's all."

Rachel had finished her breakfast. She rose and went to the window.

"I should like to see the girl before she comes here."

"No business of yours. The thing's settled. And look here, I don't want any moods or interference. I want you to make her comfortable. She's worth considering."

She smiled.

"By you?"

"Cut out the sarcasm and get busy."

In that moment by the window with the morning sun shining in she had made up her mind. It was as though in this secret crisis he had thrown a weight into the scale of her indecision. There was to be another woman in the house, and she—its supposed mistress—would be expected to exert herself for the benefit of some casual little wench who had caught a man's fancy. He had not asked her consent. He had not consulted her in any way beyond demanding that she should undertake more drudgery. There would be no more privacy for her in her own house.

"What is the girl's name?" she asked.

"Bishop. I told you that before."

"Where does she come from?"

"Does that matter?"

She began to clear away the breakfast things.

"I suppose not. I am going in to Marley this morning. Do you want anything?"

"No."

When Parris had gone out she put on her hat, took her shopping basket, and started for Marley. She avoided Marley High Street by following a path that ran between the walls of gardens and cottages and brought her to the bridge. Her impulse was to hurry, but she controlled the impulse. Such a choice as hers should be deliberate and unfurried. She did not meet a soul in the lane leading to The Hermitage, and coming to the gate in the high black fence she found that the gate was locked. Stavely had rigged up a bell that could be rung from the gate. A length of chain hung down. She rang the bell.

She heard footsteps.

"Is that you, Geoff?"

"Rachel."

"Yes. Wait. Don't open the gate for a moment. I want to ask you a question."

"Yes."

"Were you in earnest—when you said—that you—would begin things all over again—with me?"

"My dear—of course——"

"Be sure. I'm taking you at your word."

He opened the gate.

"Beloved, is it true?"

She looked at him steadfastly.

"My dear, are you sure in your heart?"

"Utterly and wholly sure."

She allowed him to lead her in. She was voiceless and grave in this moment of surrender. They sat together on an old seat under one of the yew trees.

"I want to go away, Geoff, right away. And I haven't a penny."

"I can manage."

"But this place of yours?"

"Well, it has served its purpose. It has given me . . ."

"Are you sure, my dear?"

"Do you doubt it?"

By Warwick Deeping

"I don't know. It's everything to me."

"And to me."

She let her head rest on his shoulder.

"Geoff, I'd like to go at once. When one has made up one's mind . . ."

"To-morrow?"

"As soon as that."

"Why not? I shall have one or two things to arrange. I'll go up to town to-night. I'll come back by car to-morrow. Can you be at the white gate at eleven?"

"Yes."

"I'll fetch you over in the punt. The last ferry. How wonderful."

She rose and he went with her to the gate. She kissed him with strange solemnity.

"I shan't see you again till to-morrow. What a to-morrow! It will be like being born again."

XIII

SHE was up early. She packed, though her packing was secret and confined to the filling of a very small suitcase which she locked away in a drawer. She went downstairs, and as she lit the stove and collected the breakfast things, she thought: "This is the last time."

At breakfast Parris treated her to a harsh silence. He was in the usual hurry; his lower jaw went up and down; he tore bread with his fingers and stuffed it into his mouth.

"The van's coming to-day."

"Is it?"

"I expect the girl on Monday. You'll see about it."

"Yes."

He emptied his cup. He got up, and she saw one of his big hands groping in a pocket for his pipe. He blew down the pipe and knocked the bowl against the back of the chair. A few shreds of tobacco fell on the floor.

He was gone, and she looked at the clock. Three hours of waiting and suspense. She cleared away and washed up, and dealt with the bedrooms. Then she wandered out, and

finding one of the men in the yard, she spoke to him.

"Where's Mr. Parris?"

"He's gone up to do a bit of fencing in the fourteen-acre."

"If you see him, George, tell him I've gone to Marley."

The fourteen-acre was the field farthest from the river, and she decided to take her chance now that it offered itself. She went in and put on her hat and took the suitcase from the drawer, she passed out by the back way and entered the lane as though she were going to Marley. She could strike across one of the fields to the river.

It was about ten o'clock when she reached the white gate. She hid her suitcase under a bush, and sitting down below the bank so that she was hidden from the fields, she waited. There was no sign of life across the river, but she could not expect him before eleven.

The Marley church clock struck the quarters, and when she had sat there for half-an-hour she began to feel vaguely uneasy. But she reassured herself. He was coming down from London by car, and at any moment she would hear the sound of a car in the lane. But she did not hear it. Marley church clock struck eleven, and nothing happened.

Surely she had not misunderstood him! Had anything happened? But what could happen? A breakdown? She waited for another half-an-hour, and then the suspense became too great for her. She left the suitcase hidden under the bush, and walking along the river to Marley, she crossed the bridge and followed the lane.

When she came to the gate in the black fence, she found it locked. She rang the bell. There was no response. She was frightened. What should she do? There was a green recess in the hedge opposite the gate. She sat down on the bank, and felt a kind of fatal silence closing over her happiness. She listened for the sound of a car, and no car came.

The Marley church clock struck twelve. The fingers of her right hand were twisting a tuft of grass. What was

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she to do? Perhaps something had miscarried, and he had wired to her, and the telegram had gone to the farm. But how could he telegraph to her at the farm? If the thing fell into Parris's hands . . .

She would have to go back, and on the way she called at the Marley post-office. She addressed herself to a bored young woman.

"Could you tell me whether a telegram has been sent to Beach Farm?"

"What name?"

"Parris."

"No. No telegram has been sent there."

Marley High Street seemed very bright and noisy. She escaped from it and, reaching the river, made her way back to the place where she had hidden her suitcase. Hope fluttered in her. Perhaps, while she had been in Marley, the car had arrived, but the garden of The Hermitage was empty, and the blue doors of the boathouse closed. She tried not to feel frightened. Of course, something unexpected had happened. He had been delayed. She recovered the suitcase and walked up the avenue of poplars to the farm. Her hope was to be able to slip into the house without meeting anyone.

She had reached the garden-gate and was feeling almost safe, when Parris came round the corner of the house. In her agitation she had forgotten the time.

"Well, you're a useful person."

She was terrified, and to hide it she showed temper.

"I've been to Marley, yes—on your business."

He glanced at the suitcase.

"What the devil have you got there?"

"Didn't you say you wanted extra sheets—and you wanted them in a hurry?"

She was aware of his harsh grin.

"Oh, that's it."

She was wondering whether he would tell her to open the case, and she hurried in, and he let her pass. She did not know it, but he had been watching her that morning. He even knew

that the suitcase had been left to wait under a bush.

He laughed to himself.

"So—that's it! The fellow's left her. Got what he wanted and vamoosed. Well, that's damned funny, but it won't seem funny to her."

XIV

ON that July afternoon in London Stavely had behaved rather like a happy lunatic. He had taken a taxi to Lincoln's Inn and arrived in the office of his lawyer, and to Mr. Soames of Sommerville, Soames & Soames he had appeared as a man suffering from some emotional exaltation. He had asked Mr. Soames about London hotels, and passports, and various financial matters.

"By the way, I may want to arrange a divorce."

"What, married again?"

"No, no. My future wife will have to be divorced."

Mr. Soames, who was a rather pompous person, had been a little scandalized.

"My dear Stavely we don't—arrange—divorces."

"No, of course I don't mean that. But I shall want you to represent us."

He had dashed off to an hotel that had been recommended to him by Mr. Soames. After booking rooms there he had remembered that he needed money, and that the banks closed at three. He had been walking along Piccadilly and he had supposed that he would have to revisit Mr. Soames and arrange the matter. But about foreign travel? The American Express had an office in Haymarket and he had turned down Lower Regent Street. He had been in a hurry of happy excitement.

He had passed half-way down the street to cross, and here it was that the new London had set a trap for the old Londoner in Stavely. He had no knowledge of one way traffic and its ferocious unexpectedness. A bus and two cars had gone by on the near side, and looking to the left and seeing the

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other half of the street all clear he had dashed for it. A horn had blared . . . someone had shouted. The red bus had trampled him down.

THE nurse, pausing at the foot of a screened bed, and putting the fabric of the screen aside, saw two eyes looking at her, and they expressed bewilderment and distress.

The nurse went to report to the sister.

"Number Five has recovered consciousness."

The sister left the letter she was writing and walked down the ward to the screened bed. Number Five's distress was obvious. His face was almost as white as the bandages.

"Where am I?"

"In hospital. Just keep quiet. Everything's all right."

"How long have I been here?"

"Three days. Now, you mustn't talk."

Stavely closed his eyes. She left him and spoke to the nurse. In the darkness he was trying to remember things, to link up the past and the present, but his consciousness seemed incomplete. He reopened his eyes; he saw in front of him the bulge of the bedclothes over a surgical cradle and the wooden frame and the green fabric of the screen, and suddenly he remembered things, but not how he had come to be in hospital.

"Nurse! Nurse!"

She appeared from behind the screen. She was a nice child, plain, stolid, but kind. She bent over him.

"Number Five, you must try and not worry. What is it?"

He looked at her poignantly. He was so trussed up that he could not move.

"Haven't I got a name?"

"Of course."

"Don't go away, please. I've been here three days. I've been lost for three days. Was I run over?"

"Yes."

"I've just remembered something terribly important. I—I—must write a letter. It's so terribly important."

She saw that he needed something.

"But you can't write. Shall I write it for you?"

"Please, nurse, at once."

She smiled at him reassuringly and went to fetch a writing-pad and pen. She sat down beside the bed with the pad on her knees. He lay with closed eyes. The dictating of that letter seemed to cause him a supreme effort.

"Dear Mrs. Parris,

"I am in hospital. I had an accident. They tell me I have been unconscious for three days. The nurse is writing this for me. You must have wondered, but now you will understand.

"Ever yours,

GEOFFREY STAVELY."

He opened his eyes.

"You will give my address?"

"Yes."

"The address of the letter is Mrs. Parris, Beach Farm, Marley, Bucks."

And suddenly he looked terribly bothered.

"I haven't got a stamp, nurse. I had some money."

"That's all right. You can pay for the stamp later."

"You'll post the letter at once?"

"Yes, at once."

Now, it so happened that Beach Farm kept a letter-box by the gate at the end of the lane. It could be locked, and Parris carried the key, though he sometimes grumbled at saving the postman's legs and time at the expense of his own. The Beach Farm mail did not amount at times to more than six letters a week, and those six might be bills or circulars, and two or three days might pass without Parris troubling himself about the box. On this particular morning he found that letter of Stavely's addressed to his wife. He was not a man whose ruthlessness suffered from any qualms. He opened the letter and read it.

So that was it! Something had been arranged between those two, and the adventure had miscarried. He remembered the incident of the suitcase and the fear in his wife's eyes. She had bluffed him that morning. And was this other fellow bluffing her? He stuffed the letter into a trouser pocket. Well, he would keep her guessing. He controlled that letter-box, and if any

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further letters arrived from Mr. Stavely they should be intercepted. He would teach her to play fast and loose with him and the farm.

XV

SHE had been completing the stripping of the room that had been so much hers. The heavy furniture had been packed on a wagon and sent up to be disposed of by a second-hand furniture shop in Marley. She had packed up her little pieces of china and her pictures, or transferred them to her bedroom.

Parris had issued orders :

"I want that room clearing."

She had obeyed him with a kind of dreadful docility. Life had left no protest in her. For the first two days she had refused to believe in the finality of this silence. She would receive a letter ; he would reappear ; everything would be explained. She stood for a moment and looked out of the window. There was a wet glitter in the air. She saw the sunlight and the wind playing together in the foliage of the poplars. How beautiful it was, and this beauty hurt her. The green leaves laughed while her heart was breaking.

For she had believed in him. There were moments when she still believed in him.

She heard footsteps. Her drooping figure winced into movement. She went down on her knees and was discovered rolling up a rug.

"Got busy, have you ? That's right."

He stood and watched her. She rose from her knees and, taking a piece of string from a bowl on the window-sill, she fastened it round the rolled-up rug.

"Have you put that extra chair in the kitchen ?" he said. "The girl will want to sit down sometimes."

"It's out there in the passage."

"An arm-chair ?"

"Yes."

"You've got to make the girl comfortable. I expect her to-morrow."

That evening, the evening before

Maisie Bishop arrived, she went down to the river with a little flicker of hope in her heart. Perhaps she would see him in the garden, and the blue doors of the boathouse would be open and the punt ready to glide across. Everything would be explained. She came to the white gate, and instantly that hope died in her. The place was just as it had been left for days, lifeless and deserted.

The new motor-van was delivered on the Thursday, and Miss Bishop arrived on the Saturday. She came with a tin trunk, a suitcase, a stumpy umbrella, and much assurance. She brought a little impudent breeze with her, and the house seemed to fill with her young gustiness. She was a casual and bright young thing.

"Morning, Mrs. Parris. Topping day. Where do I stow my stuff ?"

Rachel led the way upstairs. She opened the door of the back room and displayed to the girl its rather crude simplicities, but everything was very clean.

"I think there is everything here."

Maisie Bishop gave the room a quick scrutiny.

"Might be worse. I should like a bit more carpet."

Rachel's dark stare was significant.

"Perhaps you would like the carpet out of my room ?"

"What about my box ?"

"I'll help you up with it."

"No hurry. I guess Mr. Parris will lump it up for me."

Youth, this bright and bustling invasion, this other woman in the house, what did it mean and portend ? That she would have to live with it, clean and cook for it, while it chattered and paraded and flicked its skirts. She would have to sit down to table with it, meal by meal and day after day. She heard the opening of a door and a cheerful, desultory whistling. Footsteps came to the head of the stairs.

"Mrs. Parris !"

"Yes."

"Can I have some hot water ?"

And suddenly she was angry. Did the chit expect to be waited on ?

"Yes, if you come and fetch it."

Later, Parris came in, and seeing the girl's trunk in the kitchen, discovered a double opportunity. Rachel was laying the table.

"What, hasn't that gone up yet?"

"Did you expect me to carry it up?"

He picked up the trunk and shouldered up the stairs. He and the girl met on the landing. They appeared to be on very good terms with each other.

The first meal brought other reflections, for Rachel was not included in the conversation. She remained the silent third, while the other two talked shop, and watching them and listening she realized that Parris had grown younger. It was as though he had found a playmate in this new partner, and that crude youth and the crude utilitarian seemed be flesh of one flesh. And they seemed to share some secret at her expense. She was aware of Maisie Bishop watching her with her hard, blue ground-glass eyes.

Parris indulged in harsh playfulness.

"The old woman doesn't know much about machinery. Isn't that so, my dear?"

She bore with his glittering grin.

"No."

Maisie was patronizing.

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Parris. I dare say you are hot stuff with the kitchen range."

She sat there feeling confused and ashamed. They went out together and she heard them laughing in the yard.

"Let's have another trial trip, Jack."

"Righto!"

"We mustn't rev her too fast!"

XVI

STAVELY was a martyr to his mattress. He was trussed up, and his body complained. Oh, to be able to lie on some other place, to turn and to stretch, and to sleep without those sudden, startled wakings! He would try to forget his aching body and stiff back and say, "Perhaps she will

come to-day, or I shall have a letter."

But the days went by, weary, cramped and aching days, and there was no Rachel and no letter. He lay and worried, and his temperature went up. One night in his helplessness he dissolved into absurd tears. The night nurse, discovering him in this emotional state, did not allow it to pass unchallenged.

"Number Five, what *is* the matter?"

She was a kind child, and he associated her pale little face with soft hands and the blessedness of early cups of tea.

"Nurse, do you think you could write a letter for me? Only a very short letter."

Stavely was something of a mystery in the ward. The only person who had come to visit him had been the dry-as-dust and precise Mr. Soames.

"Of course."

His thin face had a bright edge.

"Now?"

"Yes, in a minute."

She fetched pen and paper, and using the case-board as a table wrote at his dictation.

"Dear Rachel,

"I am wondering whether you received my previous letter. I am in hospital here. I was knocked down by a bus and was unconscious for three days. I am very anxious to hear from you.

"GEOFFREY."

The letter found its way into the letter-box in the Beach Farm lane, and thence into Parris's pocket. He had read it with a little chuckle of malicious amusement.

Meanwhile, Beach Farm had ceased to be a silent house. Miss Bishop sang and whistled and banged doors. She recognized no authority and subscribed to no traditions. Nor did she offer to help in the house. She might drift in before a meal, and sprawl in an armchair and smoke a cigarette. She left her bed unmade, and as often as not her towel reposed on the floor. She had not been engaged to do housework.

Rachel spoke to her about it.

"I expect you to look after your own room."

Woman at the Gate

"I'm not a slavey."

Sarcasm was parried by impertinence, and when Miss Bishop referred the problem to Parris he spoke to his wife on the matter.

"It's your job to do the girl's room."

He was rough and peremptory, but she refused to be coerced.

"I shall not touch it. Any decent girl . . ."

He snarled at her.

"You shut up! I don't attach much importance to your idea of decency. I didn't engage her to do housework."

But Rachel was obdurate, and since Maisie's bed was left in a state of nature she was reduced to dealing with it herself.

Rachel began to realize that they were both in open and secret league against her. The girl had brought a gramophone with her, and at night she would play it and dance about the room, and soon she had Parris dancing with her. Rachel would read in her room by candle-light, and listen to the music and the byplay down below. Presently she would hear the creaking of the stairs and the closing of doors.

"Nighty-night, Jack."

Sometimes there would be a scuffle on stairs or landing, and she would try to close her ears to those suggestive sounds. She began to loathe sex, and especially the woman creature in herself that had been fooled by a beautiful illusion. She felt ruthless towards the woman who was Rachel. She had begun to think of escape, and in escaping ceasing to be Rachel.

XVII

THE screen had been removed from Stavely's bed. He was sitting up, he became part of the life of the ward; he had the courage to ask the young house-surgeon a question.

"How much longer do you think I shall be here?"

"Oh, another six weeks or so. We want to make a good job of you."

Stavely lay and measured out the

days and weeks. "That will bring me to September, autumn," he thought. "Yes, I suppose I shall go back there. One must explore the mystery of a mood."

He wrote no more letters, for in the face of that silence he could only wonder and remain mute. Did she think that he had played a cad's trick on her and run away, or had some other coincidence intervened? Sometimes he would contemplate that little shut-up house that had been abandoned in such haste. He had left things just as they were in his cottage by the river. Things to clear up, yes, other things besides the mystery of her silence.

They bade him leave his bed and walk, and that his legs were as weak as water was no mere figure of speech. His right thigh bone had lost an inch, and they told him that he would have to wear a boot with a thick sole. He used a pair of crutches to begin with, but soon he was hobbling about, and getting out to sit in the sun in what the hospital called its garden, a mere asphalt space in which two plane trees grew. He sat there with other patients, a courageous little community that made jokes and indulged in simple back-chat.

"Go it, uncle, keep walking."

For Stavely was always getting on his legs and exercising them up and down the asphalt court. He was growing restless, and his restlessness increased. He wanted to clear up the mystery of that silence.

XVIII

HER martyrdom was complete.

For weeks she had been alone in the house with those two, a drudge, a creature openly exploited, without money, without hope. She could not buy anything for herself; she could not pay for the mere sending of her shoes, and she had been too proud to ask him for a penny.

She felt, somehow, that he knew; he had thrown out brutal hints; he had asked her ironic questions.

"What happened to the fellow over

the water ? Vanished rather suddenly, didn't he ? ”

She had a feeling that all the humiliation that he placed upon her was deliberate. It was his revenge. He had set out to crush her because she had refused to become like one of his beasts, a mere servant of the farm. He was as ruthless as the soil. He had brought this chit of a girl into the house to show her what life would be for her in the future.

She could bear it no longer ; she felt hopeless.

On that late September evening she went up to her room and lit a candle. Bending down, she extracted the same suitcase from under the bed and placed it on a chair. Parris and the girl had gone to the Picture House at Marley. She opened drawers and began to lay her hands upon their contents, but suddenly her courage failed her. She had a few poor pieces of jewellery that she could sell, but was it worth while ? She blew out the candle and sitting down by the window she fell into a kind of stupor.

Why struggle ? Why endure ? Was anything worth while ? And conscious of a sudden horror of life she left that unpacked suitcase and went downstairs, out into the garden. The empty house did not wish her good-bye. It was hostile, her bitterest enemy, a house of mockery and of scorn. The darkness was complete, windless and autumnal, with mist rising from the river and the fields. She had left the candle burning in her room, but since she did not look back at the house, the little slip of light was not noticed.

The trunks of the poplars lost themselves in the black smother of the foliage above. She came to the white gate, and almost she had touched it before it became visible to her in the darkness. She stood leaning against the gate and looking across the river towards the little house where her illusion had died.

She passed through the gate and sat down on the bank close to a pollard willow. The grass was drenched with dew, and her feet were close to the water. The lower branches of the

willow touched it. She sat there, elbows on knees, her chin resting on her hands, and stared at the water. She was as motionless as the tree. White mist and black water, a little anguish, and then forgetfulness.

SHE nodded at the river. It was friendly ; it understood. It was like some large and placid bosom waiting for her tired head. She slipped a little farther down the bank and dipped a foot in the water. It was cold, but she would soon be unconscious of its coldness. She was aware of pausing on the brink of her crisis. For the last time she looked across the river, and in the stillness an inward voice seemed to utter a startled cry.

A light had flashed up in one of the windows of the house across the river. She sat and stared at it. Someone was in The Hermitage. Who ? New tenants ? More dolls ? She had recoiled from the river, and was kneeling on the grass. Life stirred in her again ; it throbbed and ached and would not be denied. Was that little light just another illusion ? She felt that she must know.

Something willed her to rise and walk along the river path to Marley. She crossed the bridge and followed the lane. She scorned and mocked herself.

“ Oh, don't be a fool ! ”

But she walked on. She came to the black surface of the boarded fence, and running a hand along it she touched the chain of the bell. She hesitated for a moment and then rang it.

She heard footsteps coming down the path, and the rhythm of those footsteps puzzled her, for their sound-pattern was like the beat of a heart, lub-dup, lub-dup. The man who was coming to the gate was lame, a limping stranger, but she stood with trembling knees to drink her cup of bitterness. Perhaps this new tenant could tell her something of his predecessor.

The gate opened, and it was so dark that their faces were dim and unrecognizable. She found her voice.

(Concluded on page 298)

Woman at the Gate

"I beg your pardon. I wondered whether you could tell me . . ."

She faltered and then blurted out the words:

"What became of the previous tenant?"

Why did he not answer her? And suddenly she began to tremble. He had heard her voice, but she had not heard his.

"Rachel."

Her trembling ceased.

"You?"

"Didn't you expect me to come back?"

"Expect? I don't know. I could not understand. You see . . ."

"But didn't you get my letters?"

"Letters. No."

"Good God! Who got them, then? I sent two letters from the hospital."

"Wait. Let me think. I had no letters. Then—he must have taken them. My dear—you were in hospital."

"I got run over on that very day. A bus. I was unconscious for three days. I wrote to you twice through the nurse, and when no reply came . . ."

"And I——"

"You must have thought . . ."

"Oh, never mind! What treachery, to steal my letters! You nearly died?"

"My own silly fault. They let me out this morning, and I came down here."

"I was over there. I saw the light. Oh, Geoff, I was going to drown myself."

She broke down and stood leaning against the gate-post.

"Geoff, can you forgive me?"

"Of course."

"I had ceased to care about anything. I wanted to forget. And all the time he was driving me like a beast to this. He must have known. He robbed me of those letters."

He drew her through the gate, and closing it, helped her up the path to the house, and leaning upon him she became aware of his limping, lame leg. A spasm of tenderness swept through her.

"Geoff, your poor leg! How selfish of me!"

"There is nothing wrong with my

old leg—now Rachel. It's just a little shorter than the other. You must have suffered."

"Geoff, if I hadn't seen your light!"

"Don't speak of it. That's all in the bad old past."

"I was just cleaning up. You see, not a soul had been inside the place for nearly three months, and I had left everything. Yes, the contents of the larder had to be buried in the garden."

"What about something to eat? Have you had any supper?"

She shook her head and smiled.

"No? I brought a hamper with me. Well—we'll picnic."

He turned and limped towards the door, and somehow she divined his frailness, and that he was very tired. She seemed to rise from the sofa with one swift movement.

"Geoff, let me. Sit down here. You're not fit yet to do things."

He paused in the doorway.

"Well, if it's to be a partnership, Rachel, why not now? There's not a cup or a plate fit to be used. I've got a kettle on."

"Show me. I'll do everything."

"That's not my idea of a partnership."

In the kitchen he unpacked the hamper while she dealt with the dusty crockery. She had turned up her sleeves, and the water steamed in the bowl.

He looked at her as he arranged some fruit on a dish.

"Rachel, it's just a night's camping. What about Italy for the winter? I think passports can be managed. There are little places in Italy . . ."

She dipped her hands in the bowl.

"I haven't a penny in the world," she said. "Nothing but the clothes I'm wearing."

He went and stood beside her.

"I'd rather have it like that. You and I are going to begin all over again. There are plenty of places in the world where one can begin all over again."

WARWICK DEEPING

MARTYRDOM

By WARWICK DEEPING

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MARTYRDOM

CHAPTER I

DR. JACOB PARSLOE stepped off the bus where Putney High Street joins Richmond Road. It was raining and Dr. Parsloe put up his umbrella. He had the air of a man who is displeased with his surroundings, especially with Putney and the rain.

Sighting a policeman on the other side of the road, he crossed it, frowning resentfully at the traffic, for a philosopher may be a most unphilosophic person where crude, material happenings jostle him.

"Can you direct me to Rufus Road?"

The constable gave him the necessary information as though he were reading from a guide book.

"How far is it?"

"About a mile."

Dr. Parsloe grunted and took the middle of the pavement. He was a big man, clumsily built, and he wore his black clothes clumsily, almost as though he

slept in them. They bagged at the knees, and bulged at the elbows. He walked fast, with his head forward and his umbrella held like a shield. He ignored the other people on the pavement, and ignored them so thoroughly that, menaced by the masked and advancing bulk of him, they gave way. It had taken Dr. Parsloe three years to write that epoch-making book of his, "The Variations of Vitalism." He was a truculent thinker, and he walked as he thought, ignoring irrelevant trivialities.

His big white face looked more fiercely serious than usual, and fifteen years of such seriousness had made him appear ten years older than he was, for Parsloe was just fifty. He had a tonsure, and the figure and hands of a man who had never played games.

"Confound it," he reflected, "I suppose I shall have to do something! After all I did promise Lorrimer I would do something. One ought to be more cautious in making promises."

Turning a corner he charged into somebody else's umbrella, and it was the other man who lost his hat.

"You ought to keep to the left, sir. Why don't you look where you are going?"

Parsloe did not apologize; he never apologized to anyone.

"I always keep in the middle of the path. I think you must have been doing the same thing."

"Look at my hat!" snapped the injured one, fishing it out of the gutter.

Parsloe gave it a glance of disdain.

"I suggest that you dry it before you try to brush it," he observed, and left the other man standing.

He resumed the reflections which had been interrupted by this incident, reflections upon the responsibility which was being thrust upon him by a promise given in his more generous and expansive youth. He had never expected John Lorrimer to die, and still less had he expected that his widow would follow him at the end of five years, leaving a child behind her. The facts were that Catharine Lorrimer was dying: that she appeared to have no relations; that the child was unprovided for; that she had appealed to her husband's friend. Parsloe was a man of means. His father, a boot manu-

facturer, had left him fifteen hundred a year.

"It's a scandal," he thought, "these improvident marriages!"

His face darkened. Years ago he had thought of marrying, and had become engaged to be married to a woman who had finally confessed with almost hysterical passion that he was not the sort of man whom a woman could marry. The insult had rankled. He had despised women ever since, and yet the incident had left in him a grievance against women, a sore spot in his ego-complex. There were times when he wished to possess a woman, to dominate her, enslave her, make her pay for the secretly-nursed insult the whole sex had flung at him in the person of one woman. He had the makings of a tyrant. Even his thinking was tyrannical and profoundly arrogant.

Five minutes later he found himself outside No. 17 Rufus Road, a red and yellow villa in a row of red and yellow villas, each with a doormat of a garden spread under a cramped bow window. Jacob Parsloe rang the bell and closed his umbrella, and when a tired-eyed

servant opened the door to him he thrust his hat and umbrella upon her as though she were no more than a hat-stand.

"Mrs. Lorrimer expects me. I am Dr Parsloe."

He was not an observant man, but when he was taken into that upper room where Catharine Lorrimer lay dying he was aware of her as a pair of eyes—eyes of waiting and suspense. She was the mere shadow of a woman, and the colour of parchment, and all that was left of her seemed to dwell in her eyes.

"It's such a relief—your coming. I'm so grateful."

Her voice was a little husky whisper. She was afraid of him, and yet she compelled herself to seem unafraid, for he was the one person on the earth who had the power to conjure away another and a far greater fear. She looked at him with her beseeching eyes.

Jacob Parsloe sat down. There were a score of things which he might have observed and did not observe, things which would have touched the ordinary plain man who did not sit enthroned on a transcendental egotism.

"This is deplorable," he said, "very deplorable. How long have you been ill?"

"About a year."

"H'm, about a year. Dear me."

He sat and stared at her as though the soul of her was a closed book which he did not care to read.

"Am I to understand that the child——?"

Her eyelids flickered.

"It was about Elsie. I would never have troubled you but for her. She will be stranded—utterly stranded."

"Dear me. You have not saved anything?"

"I couldn't, not from my small annuity. If only——"

Her voice died away. She lay and watched him with a kind of voiceless anguish, feeling the hardness of the man yet trying to believe that he was not hard.

"Elsie. So that is her name. I had almost forgotten."

"You are her god-father."

He ignored the reminder, and sat with folded hands, frowning.

"Let me see, how old is she?"

"Twelve."

"Twelve! As old as that!"

He appeared to reflect.

"Supposing I see her."

The woman in the bed made a sudden movement as though she had been waiting for some heartening ray of sunlight and seized the suggestive hope of it when it came. She knocked feebly on the wall at the head of her bed.

"She—she's such a gentle child," she said.

A girl came into the room, a girl with a mass of chestnut hair, dark eyes and a pale face. She was frightened; she had been crying herself to sleep at nights, and she looked like a little fragile ghost. Dr. Parsloe and this child examined each other. He looked very large and solemn to Elsie Lorrimer, and his great white face with its bald forehead and jug-shaped chin—it had the appearance of a bag hanging below his mouth—was vaguely terrifying. His large nose seemed to reach out at her; his grey eyes made her think of the ground-glass panels in the bathroom window.

"So this is Elsie."

He held out a hand, and her half-shrinking fingers were momentarily engulfed in it.

"How do you do, Elsie?"

And suddenly, she burst into tears, and hid her face on her mother's pillow.

"Dear, dear!" said Parsloe, "a little overwrought—I presume."

Kate Lorrimer laid a thin hand on the child's head.

"There—there, you mustn't cry; you must be a brave girl. Mr. Parsloe is a friend of your daddy's. It was very kind of him to come."

Parsloe sat and watched them, and his glassy eyes took note of the young girl with a sudden human attentiveness. Something had happened to him. An idea had exploded inside the profound emptiness of him, a very extraordinary and suggestive idea. He sat and smiled. He contemplated the lapse of time, eight years, a girl with lengthened skirts and burgeoning bosom; a meek girl, gentle, docile, properly disciplined, a pleasant hand-maid, a slave. And why should it not be so? The girl's fragile richness, her delicate colouring, her tears, her abandonment, piqued him.

It would be pleasant to possess something so completely that he would feel revenged upon the whole despicable sex.

"I'm afraid I have frightened her," he said.

"Oh, no; it is only that——. Elsie, dear."

The child sat up with a sudden rigid courage.

"Elsie, dear, come and kiss your godfather."

She looked at Parsloe; her eyes seemed blind; and then—obediently—she came and kissed his bald forehead.

"That's right," and he patted her shoulder. "Run away, dear; I want to talk to your mother."

She went, and Parsloe, turning to the bed with a sort of pleasant unctiousness, gave the dying woman the promise that she yearned for.

"I will look after the child. I will have her educated."

Catharine Lorrimer's eyes lost their stare of suspense.

"God bless you," she said; "you don't know what a weight you have taken off my heart."

CHAPTER II

THREE days later Catharine Lorrimer died, and a very bewildered and miserable child was taken by Jacob Parsloe to an hotel in Bloomsbury. In the taxi she clutched a little wet ball of a handkerchief, and lay back in her corner like a bird crouching in the corner of a cage. Parsloe tried to be fatherly, though Elsie's grief embarrassed him, and even when granting the naturalness of her grief he decided that a girl should be taught to control her emotions.

"My dear," he said, "try to be a brave little girl."

She did not want to be brave; she wanted to be comforted.

"Miss Nimfrey is waiting to take care of you. She is very kind. Be a brave girl."

At the Burton Hotel Elsie had her first meeting with Norah Nimfrey. She was a cousin of Jacob Parsloe's, and partly

dependent upon the great man who had summoned her from Waddington, in Sussex, and installed her for a week in a little private suite at the Burton. It was here that she fell upon Elsie and enveloped her, mingling her straw-grey hair with the child's bronze curls, and showing to Elsie a pair of short-sighted blue eyes magnified by rimless pince-nez.

"My poor dear child!"

Miss Nimfrey was a mixture of sentimentality and hardness, but Elsie was too desperately in need of sympathy to be aware of the hardness. She surrendered to Miss Nimfrey; she accepted her—high forehead, pince-nez, lipless mouth and all—and clung to her from that moment. She was gentle and impressionable, a virgin book. What Miss Nimfrey chose to write in her was written and became the law of the great man who wrote other sorts of books.

For Jacob Parsloe had a lengthy talk with his cousin on the evening after Catharine Lorrimer's funeral. Elsie was to find a home with Norah Nimfrey in the cottage at Waddington, and to be educated there by Miss Nimfrey in person,

and Parsloe promised to allow her another one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

"I want her to be educated as a woman should be educated. She must be docile and sweet tempered. She must know how to obey and to serve."

Miss Nimfrey wrinkled up her high forehead.

"You don't wish her to be modern?"

"She must be brought up in the convent idea. No mixing with boys, or with other girls unless those girls are most carefully selected. Let her learn Italian and French and a little music, and how to cook and look after a house. But—docility—obedience."

His cousin felt that there was something at the back of the great man's mind, and having a high admiration for him and being partly dependent on his bounty, she wished to be in a position to satisfy his ideals.

"Would you mind telling me, Jacob, what kind of future you contemplate for the child? If I have your end in view——"

"I contemplate marrying her. I am paying you the compliment of asking you to educate my future wife."

Miss Nimfrey was not a little taken aback, but it was no business of hers to appear astonished at the very original attitude of a great man. After all, what could be sounder than the proper education of a partner who was to take her place in so serious an alliance?

"The responsibility is a heavy one, Jacob. I wish to be clear upon one point. Is Elsie to know? What I mean is——"

"Certainly she must know. I wish that to be the central idea of her life. Everything else must be built round it. But keep her — innocent — quite unspotted. You understand?"

"Yes," said Miss Nimfrey; "I think I understand."

So Elsie was spirited away to Miss Nimfrey's prim little cottage on the outskirts of Waddington, and Dr. Parsloe paid them a visit before returning to Italy and his thinker's castle by the sea. He spent nine months of the year in Italy and three in England, declaring with great seriousness that he could think only in the sun. He took several country walks with Elsie, showing himself heavily

and paternally playful, and when he left her gave her a kiss, a sovereign, and some significant advice.

"Now—you will be a good little girl, my dear, and learn all that Cousin Norah has to teach you. I shall come and see you each year. Remember—that—I—am in your mother's place. And every month you will write me a letter."

Elsie looked at him solemnly.

"Yes, sir," she said.

He patted her hair, smiled at her docility, and went back to Italy and his epoch-making books.

Elsie was happy at Waddington. She was a shy and a sensitive child, and she allowed herself to be dominated by Miss Nimfrey's hard sentimentality, and she was not conscious of repression. The cottage had a prim prettiness, a garden, and a little orchard, and there were two fields between it and the nearest of the Waddington houses. The country was beautiful, and Miss Nimfrey had one admirable passion, a love of wild flowers, insects and birds. In some ways she was wiser than she knew, for in cutting off Elsie from romping friendships with

children of her own age, she supplied excellent compensations. Elsie was allowed puppies and kittens; she was given a piece of garden ground of her own, and was permitted to turn the summer-house into a corner of dreams. She was an imaginative child and her imagination was her companion in her games.

On Sundays Elsie and Miss Nimfrey went twice to Waddington church. It was their only dissipation, though once a month the curate's wife came to tea and brought her small daughter Evangeline with her. Evangeline and Elsie played games in the garden, held receptions in the summer-house, and discussed the future.

Evangeline was all for action.

"I'm going to drive a milk-cart when I grow up."

"And I," said Elsie, "am going to be a wife."

"Who's wife?"

"Mr. Parsloe's wife. Mother wished it."

Her receptivity had already accepted the inevitable without questioning it, for the figure of Jacob Parsloe had been

erected above the altar of the child's life. Miss Nimfrey cherished the cult. Elsie was always hearing what a wonderful man Dr. Parsloe was, how learned, how good, how kind. Almost he had the impressiveness of Jehovah, and Elsie learned that he was a jealous god and expected little girls to be loving and obedient. Some day it might be her privilege to live with this great man and make a dutiful offering of herself in return for all that he had done for her.

Jacob Parsloe's books were kept in a special ebony book-slide on the mahogany table in Miss Nimfrey's drawing-room. She was very proud of them, somehow contriving to harmonize their new-world philosophy with her own prim orthodoxy. On several occasions Elsie possessed herself of one of Mr. Parsloe's books, and set herself to make his acquaintance under the cherry-tree on the small lawn at the back of the cottage. She began with the "Variations of Vitalism," and being unable to make head or tail of it, she was impressed by the great man's profundity. Inadvertently leaving the book on the grass while she indulged in

a day dream, it was attacked and treated with scant reverence by Blot, her latest puppy. Blot found no difficulty in dealing with Mr. Parsloe's wisdom. He tore the book out of its cover, was castigated, and was the cause of Elsie's tearful departure to bed.

"What—would—Mr. Parsloe think of such carelessness?"

And Elsie realized that her god could be offended.

Each year Dr. Parsloe arrived from Italy and spent a fortnight in Waddington, staying at the "Mitre" in the village, where no one knew anything about him or his books. He took Elsie for walks, he catechized her, and he approved. From year to year the child saw little change in him; she was awed by his supposed greatness, by his size, by his rolling voice, by her own imagined debt to him. He represented duty, her mother, and the whole scheme of civilization. She was utterly innocent, and her happy docility had accepted all Miss Nimfrey's suggestive discipline.

She neither liked nor disliked Jacob Parsloe. It was not a question of liking.

He seemed to her as inevitable as the sky, or a sermon on Sunday, or her dinner, or the ending of winter by the spring.

As for Parsloe he approved.

"Norah, I congratulate you. I find Elsie both highly intelligent and obedient."

"And pretty," said his cousin; "the child is going to have looks."

Parsloe smiled faintly.

"Yes—I think she has a certain prettiness. Not too much mirror, my dear Norah; not too much mirror."

Elsie was fifteen when she became aware of a certain change in her great protector and friend. Arriving from Italy that year he looked at her with more distinct and active approval, with an appreciative glint of the eyes. He seemed kinder. He kissed her; he fondled her more than had been his custom, stroked her hair and pinched her cheek. Once when Miss Nimfrey happened to be out he took Elsie on his knees and talked to her with heavy yet menacing fondness.

"So my little girl is going to make me a good little wife."

"Yes, Mr. Jacob, I hope so," she said with gentle shyness.

"That's right, that's right."

In appearance, he had not changed, and Elsie saw no outward change in him, for she was far too much of a child to realize the nature of the man who had shut her up in a cage. Parsloe always had had eccentric tendencies, and he was growing more and more eccentric, more self-centred, more arrogant, more the old man in possession. He had offended all his old friends, for a man who has a savage sense of his own infallibility is not fit to have friends. He had begun to live like a hermit, shutting himself up with his own grandiloquent meditations. He was growing slovenly, careless, mean, and overbearing. His villa on the Italian coast was becoming an ogre's fortress in which he tore the flesh from the bones of other men's books, and indulged himself in savage scorns. Always he had been intolerant of criticism, and his vanity, living in select isolation, had grown like some rank and over-fed plant.

But how was a child to know all this? Miss Nimfrey may have suspected it, but she shut those thin lips of hers and did not interfere. She—too—had a griev-

ance against the opposite sex, and her inverted spite took an almost sinister pleasure in cheating a young man for the benefit of an old one.

Yet even she was to have her moment of fear, of remorse and compassion. It happened before the marriage, when Elsie was eighteen. All the arrangements had been made: the banns had been put up for the first time in Waddington church; there had been shopping excursions to town; the buying of Elsie's trousseau. The wedding was to be a quiet one, and Parsloe and his young wife were leaving at once for Italy.

He loomed up like a big black bird, ready to pounce and to carry off something in his claws. He radiated a kind of menacing and hungry good humour, and for the first time in her life Elsie became conscious of him as something other than Dr. Jacob Parsloe. She felt a shrinking, a bewilderment, a fluttering of her wings against mysterious bars.

Three nights before the marriage, she appeared suddenly like a ghost in Miss Nimfrey's bedroom. She was in her night-dress, and her wonderful hair hung about

her. She looked like a victim, and the elder woman's heart misgave her.

"Oh, Auntie, I'm frightened!"

She clung to the austere figure in the bed, and Miss Nimfrey tried to comfort her.

"Frightened, Elsie! Why, what is there to be frightened of?"

"I don't know. But is there anything——?"

"My dear, there is nothing for you to be afraid of. You are going to have a beautiful home, and a kind and distinguished husband."

"I know—I know—— But, oh—Auntie, it's all so strange!"

"There, there," said Miss Nimfrey; "all that shopping has over-excited you. Make up your mind to be happy and you—will—be happy."

CHAPTER III

On their way south the Parsloes stopped for two nights in Paris.

An Englishman who happened to travel in the same compartment with them in the train from Turin to Genoa was struck by the girl's attitude and expression. She seemed to shrink defensively into her corner. She did not speak. She had the appearance of having been surprised and overcome by some secret horror, and she was still dominated by it, and by the man who sat opposite her in the other corner. Her lids were red. She looked at him half furtively. When he spoke to her she seemed to give a sort of start, and to answer him coherently cost her an obvious effort.

The Englishman was interested in them both: in the girl's wedding-ring and new clothes, in her youth, her frightened bewilderment, and in her husband. This chance observer took a great dislike to

Parsloe. Not only was he far too old for the girl, but he did not appear to realize that it was necessary to treat her with great gentleness. He was a tyrannical, greedy person. The girl's frightened eyes seemed to annoy him; he was dissatisfied and impatient.

Once he spoke rather roughly to her.

"Come, come, now, why not look at the scenery? You have not seen Italy before."

The girl's eyes filled with tears. She said nothing; but she turned her face to the window, and held her handkerchief to her mouth.

Parsloe eyed her with obvious annoyance, and an air of ownership that was menacing.

As for the chance Englishman, he glanced at Parsloe with a look that said: "You—ought to be kicked."

It was autumn when Elsie Parsloe came to her new home, the Villa Pineta. She had her first glimpse of it as the carriage drove along the lovely coast from Santa Maria, with the cliffs and hills rising up on one side and the sea a blue sheet upon the other. She saw it as a square, grey,

tower-like building standing on a headland above the sea. The flanks of the headland were almost precipitous, and covered above with a tangle of pines, ilexes, and wild olives. The carriage stopped outside the gate of the Villa Pineta, and Elsie saw it as a massive wooden door set in a stone wall that was twenty feet high, and this wall—carried across the narrow neck of the headland, isolated it completely.

Parsloe was watching her.

"My castle, my dear!" he said.

He rang the heavy bell, and the gate was opened by an Italian in blue trousers and a striped shirt, Luigi, the gardener, sixty-five years old. The luggage was carried in, the vetturino paid, and the gate closed on them. Elsie heard the carriage driving away to Santa Maria, and the jingling of the bell and the clatter of hoofs dying away under the cliffs left her with an added sense of loneliness.

She felt her husband's big hand on her shoulder.

"We are not disturbed here. And it is beautiful."

She was aware of something ironical in

him, a threatening and tyrannical fondness, the pressure of his hand forcing her gently up the broad path to the house. Beautiful indeed it was, this half wild garden on the headland floating above the sea, with the afternoon sunlight warming it, and the vine leaves turning to gold. Yet Elsie felt chilled, menaced. She shrank from the place as she had begun to shrink from the man. The shadows of tall cypresses fell across the path. Here and there a statue glimmered white in a mass of dusky foliage. There were flowers, rocks, cacti clinging to grey ledges, roses and climbing plants threading the trees and bushes, palms, orange trees with fruit upon them. She had glimpses of secret walks, the blue sea seen between the trunks of pines, a little round Classic temple half hidden by arbutus and box. It was beautiful, extraordinarily beautiful—and yet——!

They came to the house. Its tower-like face was reached by a broad flight of steps and entered by an arched doorway. An old woman waited at the top of the steps—an old woman, broad and squat, with a swarthy and expressionless

face. To Elsie she looked like someone who had never been young.

Parsloe nodded at her.

"This—is Anna."

The woman's black eyes stared at Elsie, and she did not smile.

"Welcome, signora."

They entered the house. The tiled hall led into rooms which were huge, silent and lofty, and from their windows it was possible to drop a stone into the sea. Elsie could hear it murmuring and splashing on the grey-black rocks far below. The sound followed them everywhere, up the marble staircase to Parsloe's library, a room with a stone balcony jutting out into the blue. It was overwhelmed with books—this room; they ran up to the ceiling and lay in piles upon the floor. Near the window stood a knee-hole writing-desk.

"This—is where I work."

She had a feeling that he expected her to be impressed, but she was conscious only of feeling miserable, caged. And caged with him!

"What numbers of books," she said.

He patted her shoulder.

"Work—here—for my little wife. I want you to keep them dusted and in order. I want you to make a catalogue and an index. My Elsie is going to be very useful to me."

She had not a word to say, and her silence brought that frown to his forehead. His marriage had begun by disappointing him, in spite of Miss Nimfrey's years of discipline and Elsie's apparent docility. He remembered that first night with a shivering and shocked child sitting in her nightdress in the dark by the open window, dumb and terrified. He had been angry, sexually angry. It had seemed to him preposterous that she should have been shocked. Well, he would take steps to change all that!

"Come and see our rooms."

He swung her round and upstairs to the second floor, and here he showed her their bedroom, and a little room opening off it which he said she might consider as her very own. The furniture was Italian and made of walnut, and it looked heavy and ugly. Parsloe, standing in the middle of the bedroom, crushed her to him and forced a kiss.

She was cold as stone, but she did not resist.

"What a big house it is," she said. "Who does all the work?"

"Anna. But—of course—my dear—you will help. I believe in women working, even little women!"

His heavy playfulness was more frightening to her than his solemnity.

"Oh, yes—I will work," she faltered; "I like doing things about a house."

"Excellent," he said.

Later, she escaped into the garden and explored it, and behind all her exploration was the fear of a live thing shut up in a cage. She came to realize the nature of Parsloe's home. The high wall shut it off from the world, and she discovered that the gate was kept locked and that someone pocketed the key. The headland was completely isolated. There was one spot, a little narrow inlet with a steep path going down to it, which made the headland approachable from the sea, but Elsie did not discover that till later.

"I'm shut in here," she thought; "and there is no escape."

So her married life began, and if her

heart had cried out in her at the first shock of it, it soon ceased to rebel. Parsloe and the life of the Villa Pineta overwhelmed her, and in a little while she was accepting it all with a docility which had been instilled into her during the last six years. She was helpless and very unhappy, but in a little while she discovered that it was necessary to hide her unhappiness, for it made Parsloe angry. He flew into rages, and these rages of his terrified her. He was rough; he shouted; and once he made her hold out her hand and he struck at it savagely with a heavy ivory paper-knife.

"Oh, don't——! You have hurt me!"

"Learn to smile, and I shan't have to hurt you."

Slowly and systematically he crushed her both spiritually and physically, and she was such a little thing and so easily crushed. She became meek and dully consenting beneath the uxorious and jealous tyranny of this Jehovah of a husband. She had no experience to prove to her that as a husband he was not normal, and for years she had been overawed by the greatness of him, and fed

upon Miss Nimfrey's anthems of praise. "I must be obedient and he won't frown at me."

The grieved male that was in Parsloe chuckled. He possessed a woman, a slave, a little dark-eyed, dutiful handmaid who waited upon his every whim.

Moreover, bully that he was, he felt secure. His orientalism sunned itself in a sense of its own cleverness. He had his Eve shut up in a garden where the only man thing was old Luigi, aged sixty-five, and there was no escape from the garden save by his—Jacob Parsloe's—consent. Once a month he would hire a carriage, and they would drive to Santa Maria or up into the hills to San Pietro. Elsie never went outside the gate without her husband, save to sit meekly beside him in the carriage, with a far away look in her eyes.

But life is cumulative, and all through that winter while Parsloe was teaching his caged bird to sing when he wished it, and to be silent when he commanded silence, he was laying up the seeds of punishment for himself. Like so many so-called great men, he was an overweening

fool. His arrogance grew blind. He lived like a god in his retreat, a slovenly god who seemed to despise all the little fastidious things that matter. He was dirty; he would wear the same collar for a fortnight, and he shaved himself only when the spirit moved him. He had developed the continental habit of using a toothpick at meals, and he used it with an air of naked self-satisfaction. At night he would make Elsie stand behind his chair and stroke his hair with her little white fingers. He said it helped him to think.

By the time that the Spring came in she had begun to loathe him—though she was not acutely and actively conscious of her loathing, for she was too helplessly dumb and suppressed. The feeling was deep down in her under-consciousness, and was fed like some subterranean pool by slow percolation from the life above. Even the beauty of the world about her was in danger of growing ugly with the ugliness of this man's cruel selfishness.

She remembered sitting at the window of her little room one April day with the sea making a gentle murmur on the rocks below, a sea that was almost as blue as

the sky above. She was conscious of a kind of anguish of yearning, for the world below her was full of the Spring. She had heard a peasant singing among the olive trees on the hills, the song a man sings when life is good and his heart is happy.

Her eyes filled with tears.

And then, suddenly, she was aware of that moving speck of colour out to sea, a blot of blurred crimson. She had to dry her eyes to look at it, to make sure that it was not a piece of colour in the rainbow of her tears.

She saw a boat with a crimson sail catching the sunlight out to sea, and somehow it pleased her, and she sat and watched it as a sick woman watches the play of sunlight on the walls of her room.

CHAPTER IV

ENGLISH people had taken the old Villa Andrea sunning itself in a green cleft of the hills about half a mile away along the coast. Their name was Lutterel, and the mother was an invalid, and yet not such an invalid that she had lost the joy of living. She had her son with her, a young man who had money of his own, who had taken "firsts" at Cambridge and was now a barrister-at-law.

"I think I'll play for six months, mater, before joining in the great scuffle."

Mary Lutterel loved him very dearly, for he was a rather lovable lad, but she loved him wisely and with the full knowledge of what a mother loses when she loves like a fool. She knew that some day she would lose him in the sense that he was hers, but that in losing she might win him and also a daughter.

They were quite happy together up at the Villa Andrea. Mary Lutterel read

and lay in the sun, and painted a little, and dreamed of things that had been and of things that were to be. Geoffrey—or Geoff, as she called him—climbed the hills and sailed his boat which lay in the boat-house below in the little bay, and swam, for he was a great swimmer. His centre-board dinghy had a crimson sail.

The Lutterels may have heard of Jacob Parsloe, but that they knew anything of the inner life of the people on the headland was wholly improbable, and all that happened afterwards was the product of coincidence.

Elsie was with Parsloe in his library one morning, copying out some notes for him. She had finished her piece of work, and while her husband was rummaging solemnly among some books she stepped out on to the stone balcony and looked down at the sea. A flaking of foam surrounded the headland, and here and there isolated black rocks pushed the blackness of their half-submerged backs through the swaying surface of the blue water. Elsie was watching the play of the sea when she became aware of something else.

A man was swimming down there; she saw the movement of his head and the white play of his arms in the blue water. She was astonished; she stood very still, watching him, and saw him make for one of the basking rocks and climb out into the sunlight. He stood up; he was wearing a light blue bathing-dress, and she thought that he looked very tall and slim and graceful. His skin had a tinge of brown.

Suddenly, he glanced upwards and saw a girl on the distant balcony. The joy of the morning was in him, a happy, laughing exultation in the goodness of things and in his own strength. He waved a hand to her. Elsie waved back.

She saw him poised for a moment, and then he dived and began his passage homewards, keeping well out and away from the rocks. She continued to watch him. She had forgotten all about her solemn curmudgeon of a husband, and then she found him standing at her elbow.

"What on earth are you staring at, Elsie?"

For the first time in her life something within her resented that hectoring tone

of his. She remembered, too, that he was short-sighted, though he would never allow that his sight had grown indifferent.

"Isn't it an octopus?" she said.

"Where?"

"Down there. Or perhaps——?"

He wrinkled up his forehead.

"Don't be silly," he said. "I fail to see anything."

She stared at him; she thought for the moment that he was being sly with her, for he had a ponderous slyness of his own; and then she realized that he could not see the swimmer out yonder.

She broke into laughter.

"How silly of me! I was sure that I saw an octopus. There are small ones, aren't there?"

"There are," he said; "but women see all sorts of absurd things—women and children."

She was to see the swimmer again, and many times, for the half-mile of water between the Villa Andrea boat-house and the headland gave young Lutterel both distance and a mark to aim at. His choosing of the headland had had no other significance, but the tower-

like house perched up yonder and the girl's figure on the balcony were certain to provoke conjectures. He knew that Dr. Jacob Parsloe lived there, "The Learned Englishman," as the Italians called him, and Lutterel had read one of Parsloe's books. It would have bored him, had not its arrogance and its scorn for most other thinkers provoked the intellectual antagonism of a young man who hated all priggery, intellectual or otherwise. He supposed the girl on the balcony to be Parsloe's daughter, and so natural was the assumption that it was never corrected until other impulses had been born.

Sometimes he would sit and bask on one of the rocks, but only once again did he see the girl; but she saw him, and the figure of the swimmer tantalized her. He seemed so free, so strong, so much the master of all that world of sea and sky and air, while she was cooped up, with all the youth in her suppressed. It was very natural that the figure of the swimmer should come to be symbolical, a challenge to that in her which was alive yet sleeping. The woman in her

stirred—the girl-woman waiting for her mate.

“I wonder who he is?” she thought.

“It must be lonely for a girl—there,” was his reflection.

“I suppose I shall never know who he is, and never see him any nearer,” she decided.

“I wonder what sort of daughter a man like Parsloe would have?”

Each assumed that the other was no more than a passing cloud-shadow over the sea, and so it might have been but for the south-west wind. It blew hard one morning, and Elsie, idling in the garden, saw the cypress tops bent like sickles. The sea was a hard blue, and ridged with white horses, and on the hills the ruffled olives showed the grey underlining of their leaves.

“It is too rough for him to swim this morning,” she thought.

She came down through a little thicket of pines to where a terraced walk ran along the edge of the cliff, and as she reached the walk she saw her swimmer there beyond the point. She was astonished, and a moment later she was afraid,

for even to her inexperienced eyes it seemed that all was not well with him. He had dared the rough sea beyond the point where the headland gave no shelter, but he had turned about and was fighting his way back, and making very little progress. Sometimes she lost sight of him for a moment, and she held her breath. Slowly, but very slowly, he made towards the headland and the comparatively calm water under the lee of it.

He gained it. She saw him right below her, and she realized that he was swimming very feebly. He was exhausted. He turned on his back and floated, in order to rest, but the set of the current began to drift him away from the land. He struck out again, and Elsie realized that he was trying to reach the rocks below her, and in realizing it she remembered that the cliffs dropped into the water like a well, save at one place where there was a cleft in them and a steep path went down to a tiny inlet. She wondered whether he knew of it, whether he would find it.

She ran. She reached the rough path and scrambled down it, and when she

was halfway down it she had a sudden, vivid picture of him floating in the blue-green water framed by the grey walls of the cleft. He was about twenty yards from the shore, almost motionless, his head half submerged, his arms moving feebly. She paused there, holding to the stem of a shrub, horrified by the thought that he was going to sink under her very eyes.

She scrambled on, calling to him.

"Here—here—swim this way."

Her voice must have roused a last effort in him, for he half raised his head, and making a few spasmodic strokes, he managed to reach the shallow water, but here his strength failed him and he collapsed within a yard or two of the shore. There was a patch of rough shingle here, and he lay on it with the water washing over him. Elsie had reached the bottom of the path. She realized that he might drown even in that shallow water.

She splashed her way down to him, got her hands under his shoulders, and dragged him towards safety. He had not lost consciousness completely, and he was able to help himself and her, and when she

rolled a boulder forward with one foot and put it under his head, he spread his arms with an air of exhausted and consenting relief and lay still.

But soon he was sitting up, and smiling at her.

"I say, that was a near thing! If it had not been for you——"

She smiled back at him, strangely moved by his English voice. They were a little shy of each other, these two, and with that quick shyness which often is part of a swift, mutual liking.

He glanced at her wet feet and skirt.

"I'm sorry——"

"But I'm not," she said; "it was lucky that I saw you."

"It was. I shall remember."

He stood up; he was a little shaky but smiling, and she thought how straight and clean his eyes were. He, too, was filled with a sudden sense of her delicate and gentle comeliness. She was his type in voice, eyes, figure, skin and hair.

"I say, you ought to go and change those wet things."

She flushed, for it was a new thing for her to be considered.

"But you?"

"Oh, I'm quite all right now. I have been just as badly cooked in the "Mays" at Cambridge, and forgotten all about it five minutes afterwards. I shall just drop back into the sea and swim to that point there where the road runs above the beach. I can do a sprint home."

"Is it quite safe?" she asked.

He looked with sudden attentiveness into the brown solemnity of her eyes.

"Oh, quite. Please don't worry. I'm most awfully grateful to you. By the way, my name is Lutterel, Geoffrey Lutterel; my mother and I have the Villa Andrea along there."

"And my name is——"

"Oh, I know that," he said with a quick smile; "or at least—part of it. Mr. Parsloe is a celebrity."

"Elsie is the other part."

He repeated it—"Elsie," and it was obvious that it pleased him. They looked at each other with significant and momentary intentness, and then he wandered out, and turning before he plunged, waved a hand.

"I suppose you were here before we

were. If you would come and call on my mother—I know she would be delighted. She is an invalid.”

“Dr. Parsloe never calls on anyone,” she said.

His face expressed faint surprise.

“I see. I expect he is too big to bother about formalities. But—the sea has introduced us.”

She nodded, and watched him swim along under the cliff till he reached the stretch of shore below the road. From the roadway he turned and looked back, and seeing her still standing there, waved a hand.

“Ought I to tell?” she thought as she climbed the path; “no, I won’t tell. Surely I have a right to just one little secret of my own.”

Lutterel, trotting barefooted along the lonely road, smiled at his own thoughts.

“Who would thought that a pedant like Parsloe would have had that girl for a daughter!”

CHAPTER V

As Lutterel had put it, "The sea has introduced us," and the sea became the inevitable pathway, the way of fate between these two.

Mary Lutterel heard of the adventure, and from the way he spoke of it she knew that though he had escaped the sea, he had been captured by something else, the set of a girl's head, the way she looked, the light behind her eyes.

She met the situation resignedly, knowing that a generously opened door is less provoking than one that is kept shut.

"Why not ask Miss Parsloe to call? I should like to write and thank her."

"Parsloe is not a social light, mater."

"But the girl——?"

"I think she is rather shy."

His mother knew that this shyness pleased him.

The rough weather continued for two days, and it rained as it can rain in the

south, but when the south-west wind died away, and the sea became a great turquoise under the spring sky, the hunter went forth to his hunting. He got out his dinghy from under the overhanging shade of the ilexes and pines, and sculling out of the narrow bay, set a course for the headland. The wind was very light and off the shore, but someone on the headland saw the crimson sail.

She stood there on the balcony of Parsloe's room, knowing that the room was empty, and that the heavy presence had left it. Dr. Parsloe had gone to Rome to buy books and to attend some symposium of the learned, and he would remain in Rome ten days. Ten precious, unshadowed days!

The crimson sail came nearer. She watched it, conscious of the drift of some new meaning into her life, half guessing that the man who steered that boat steered it with a purpose. In a little while it was off the headland and lying close below her. Lutterel stood up. He shouted something, raised his hat and pointed towards the place where she had rescued him.

She could not catch his words, but his meaning was in her heart.

Should she go down? For in that instant of time she knew what her going down would signify. Youth called, and she stood there trembling to the bird-note of her own desire. Should she go? And then her own youth carried her away, blindly and yet not blindly. She knew, she fore-saw, she fore-felt. There was wilfulness in her going, a cry of revolt, a reaching-out to that joy and anguish which had been denied her. She felt somehow that she was throwing herself from a height into the sea, and that life was like that, inevitable, sacrificial.

Lutterel had run the boat aground on the little strip of shingle and he sprang out to meet her. She knew at once by the look in his eyes what had made him come.

"I want to thank you again. By the way, my mother is writing to you. She would like to meet you and Dr. Parsloe."

She flushed, a soft kindling colour under her white skin.

"Dr. Parsloe has gone to Rome."

"But you——?" he asked; "why shouldn't I take you back to lunch?"

She hesitated, having her own inward reasons for not wishing to meet another woman and that woman—his mother.

"Dr. Parsloe won't let me—— I mean—he prefers solitude."

He was surprised, a little puzzled, but he was very quick in sensing a delicate shade of feeling, and he abandoned the argument. But he had another suggestion to make.

"Mayn't I take you for a sail?"

"I should love it."

He handed her into the boat, and in entering it she knew that she was beginning a voyage upon a strange and hazardous sea.

Lutterel went back to the Villa Andrea, and during lunch he made some sort of confession to his mother.

"I don't think I should send that letter, mater."

Her eyes, waited, asking a question.

"She seemed a little unhappy at the idea. I haven't quite got the situation. There is something queer in the life there."

"Eccentricities?"

"My feeling is that Parsloe is an old

man of the sea. A tyrant. I could gather that from the stuff he writes."

"He believes in the protected daughter!"

"That is for me to find out."

He was off the headland again next day, and on the day after that, and when once love had descended the path, it learns to descend it blindfold. It was not that Elsie did not care; she had begun to care so much that she braved further caring. Life had come to her, surprising, poignant and wonderful. She had not asked for it; she had not suspected its passionate appeal; but now that it had come she clung to it with sudden desperate happiness. Why should she not be happy for a week? She knew now how greatly Jacob Parsloe had sinned against her innocence. Moreover, the awakened woman in her knew that she would never forgive him.

The sea was still, and the sun shone. She looked into the man's eyes, and he into hers.

"I say—I should like to teach you to swim."

"But I have no dress."

"I'll buy one at Santa Maria."

He bought the dress, and she changed her clothes in the little classic temple and went down to him with her bronze hair blowing, and her limbs white as her throat. She saw his eyes. She was so beautiful to him that he was awed.

"Elsie, you are——"

She gave him one dear, veiled look, half confused, half exultant.

"I promise not to be frightened."

"As if I could do anything to make you afraid!"

She learnt in two lessons. At the end of a week she could swim out to one of the rocks beyond the headland, and Anna saw them there, and Elsie knew that she was seen. She did not care. And then, suddenly, she began to care. It came upon her abruptly with the realization of the amazing fact that he believed that she was Parsloe's daughter.

She discovered it quite casually, and the discovery distracted her. How had it come about? She remembered that they had always treated Parsloe as an impersonal figure; that she had never spoken of him as her husband, and that Lutterei

had never referred to him as her father. She felt her very soul quivering in its fragile shell.

"I shall have to tell him," she thought; "I must tell him before—he—comes back."

But what effect would the truth have upon Lutterel? Would he hate her? Would he think that she had deceived him? Would not all the glamour go? Was it fair to him to leave him dreaming even for one other day?

She had taken off her wedding ring and hidden it on that first morning, not because she had wished to deceive, but rather as a symbolical act, a putting off from her of that other man's memory. She regretted it, and on that eighth morning she went down to the sea with the ring upon her finger.

"Two more days, two more days," was her inward cry, "and I am killing them!"

Lutterel was waiting for her, and together they swam out to one of the rocks. He had not noticed that hoop of gold, but he was aware of the shadow upon her, the darkness of her veiled eyes. "What ails you?" he thought, with a love that hovered.

He reached the rock first, and climbing out knelt down to help her up. She gave him one hand, the hand with the ring on it, and he saw it. She could feel the sudden pause in him, that moment of rigidity, as though the full action of life had stopped. He helped her out. They sat down side by side in the sun. He was silent, and stealing a glance at him, she saw his eyes.

And suddenly, she laid a hand on his, her other hand, for that silence was not to be borne.

"Geoff, I thought you knew! It was only yesterday——"

He did not look at her.

"Then, he is——?"

"Yes, my husband."

"Good God!" he said, and sat staring.

She began to tremble even in the warm Italian sunlight, and she could not control that quivering of her limbs. He felt it. The vibration spread to him, but not passively, for his was a man's trembling before the crisis of an impassioned act.

"Elsie——"

He put an arm round her.

"What made you——? Yes, you must tell me. I've got to know."

She hid her face.

"Don't——! I can't bear it. O, Geoff, I wish I were dead!"

From that moment his love took charge of her; he was very gentle yet very masterful, for that cry of hers had gone to his heart.

"Elsie, we can't talk here, and I must talk to you. Come."

He dropped back into the sea and drew her gently after him, and side by side they swam back slowly to the cleft in the cliffs. She hung her head and stood miserable and submissive.

"What do you want me to do?"

"You are coming out in the boat with me, Elsie. Go and change; I'll change here."

She went, and in a little while she returned to him, drooping, heavy-eyed and pale.

"I've hurt you, Geoff," she said.

"I'm thinking of you," he answered.

They put out to sea, and Lutterel hoisted the sail, but when they were a mile from the coast he lowered the sail and let

the boat drift on the calm water. They sat side by side in the stern sheets, hands clasped, heads together.

"Now, you will tell me everything. I love you, and I have a right to know."

She told him the history of her life, from the day when Jacob Parsloe had come to the house where her mother lay dying.

Neither of them knew of that carriage trundling along the coast road from Santa Maria, or guessed that Parsloe had returned before his time. He arrived. Luigi opened the gate for him and carried in his bag, and at the top of the steps leading into the house Parsloe found Anna waiting for him, the sinister and inscrutable Anna who never smiled.

"Where is the signora?"

She looked at him with a grim curiosity that had an element of contempt.

"She is not here, signor."

"Not here!"

"No; she is in a boat with a young man."

Anna turned about and entered the house, and Parsloe followed her. She went to one of the seaward windows of the dining-room and pointed.

"Out there. Every day they swim together. I have watched them with the opera glasses. He is a very handsome young man."

Parsloe, the philosopher, cursed her.

"Damn you, where are the glasses? Why didn't you send me word?"

"The glasses are on the table in your library, signor."

He rushed upstairs with a kind of blundering fury. He sat down in a chair by the window with the glasses in his hands.

Dusk was falling, a warm, April dusk, when Lutterel climbed the path from the boat-house to the garden of the Villa Andrea. It was full of perfumes, this garden; full of sad silences; and as he went up through the thickets and under the pergola, with its vines and roses and wisteria, he remembered the lips that he had kissed. His mother was on the terrace, lying in her long chair. She smiled at him as he came to her in the dusk, and then her smile died away.

He stood quite still, looking out towards the sea.

"Geoff," she said very softly.

She saw his head go up with a movement of defiance, defiance of life, not of her. He walked to the balustrade. When he spoke his voice had a fierce tenderness behind it.

"She's Parsloe's wife."

There was a short pause between each of his tense sentences.

"He's a beast to her. She's unhappy. He adopted her when she was quite a kiddie, had her drilled and disciplined into the idea of marrying him. She was utterly innocent. He kept her a child, hidden away with some damned female relation of his, and then—he married her. He is somewhere over fifty, and she's nineteen."

His mother lay very still.

"Poor Geoff," she said.

He faced about suddenly, and when she looked at him she knew that the first tragedy had come into his life.

"I could kill that man," he said.

She held out a hand to him.

"Geoff, dear, be kind—to her—and to yourself. Don't see her again."

"I—must—see her again," he said.

CHAPTER VI

ELSIE, climbing the path with Lutterel's kisses fresh upon her face, was taken unawares by the man who was waiting for her by the wall on the edge of the cliff. He had been leaning upon it, listening to the voices below, and to the splash of Lutterel's sculls as he pulled away.

"I presume that you have enjoyed yourself!"

She stood very still, a little, desolate figure looking up with frightened eyes into his ominous face.

"I did not know you were back."

"Obviously!" he said, and laughed; and that laugh of his shocked her.

He made no attempt to touch her, but she felt his bulk overshadowing her with the menace of things physical.

"Who is the young gentleman?"

She held her breath.

"I shan't tell you."

He bent over her.

"Oh, you won't! Well, I'll find out, if necessary. But I don't think that it will be necessary."

Her little flash of defiance died away. He leaned against the wall with his back to it and his arms resting on the stone coping, and observed her with ugly and savage intentness. He sneered.

"All women are alike. Even a child like you, ready to be fooled and to fool."

She hung her head.

"It was you who did the first wrong—in marrying me."

"Oh, did I!" he snarled.

"Yes, I didn't know. You kept me in ignorance of everything. You——"

"I saved you from a kitchen or the gutter, my dear."

"I wish you had left me there," she said.

His anger grew thunderous.

"That's gratitude! A man may do everything for a girl, but when some two-penny halfpenny boy turns up she forgets all her promises. But clear your mind of all that nonsense. I married you, and I'm your husband."

He caught her by the arm.

"Come along. I'll give you a lesson. I'll teach you to whom you belong."

She did not resist, for she was too overwhelmed and too miserable, nor had she divined the complete cruelty of his purpose. He led her into the house where the daylight was growing dim. She turned instinctively towards the dining-room, and blundering against him and his opposing purpose, was pushed towards the stairs. They climbed the first flight, and she imagined that he was taking her to the balcony to scold her like some super-schoolmaster, but they passed the library door, and then—she understood.

"No, no, not up there!"

They were at the foot of the second flight, and she hung back, pleading.

"No, no, oh—please——"

He jerked her savagely by the arm.

"Come on."

"No, no, Jacob—you can't—you——"

She began to struggle, and her struggles enraged him. The veins stood out on his forehead. She was aware of his big white face hanging even as he picked her up in his arms and carried her to their

room. She ceased to struggle, but made a little moaning appeal.

"Oh, don't——! It's not right; it's horrible. I don't love you. Jacob, please kill me, but not that!"

He had no pity.

"You shall learn," he said.

When he left her she remained for a long while with her face buried in the pillow, making no sound, and lying quite still. The room grew dark, but it was less dark than her thoughts. For this man had taken her love and crushed it, covered it with shame, and left it broken and humiliated. She loathed him. He had become a horror to her, a thing of savage and brutal baseness.

Presently she shivered and stood up, and going to the window, drooped there with her face towards the sea. She could distinguish the dim shapes of the rocks where she and Lutterel had swum together and sat dreaming in the sunlight. A great pang shot through her.

"My mate, my life's mate," she said in a whisper, "this man has made me—not fit for you."

She felt a horror of herself. She wanted

to efface the strain of it, to forget, to die.

"I can't go on living" she thought. "I can't—I can't."

She stroked the window ledge with the tips of pensive and caressing fingers.

"No, not from here, not from this window."

Her purpose took shape. She crossed softly towards the door, and feeling for the lock, found that the key was on the inside and the door unlocked. She crept out and down the stairs, but below her she saw an oblong patch of light, the open doorway of the library where Parsloe's lamp had been lit. She thought to slip by it unnoticed, but as she passed the doorway she heard his voice.

"Elsie, come here——."

She fled, only to hear him following her down the stairs, and she could feel them shaking with his angry, blundering weight. The garden door was shut, but she got it open. Parsloe had reached the foot of the stairs.

"Stop!" he said.

But she was out in the soft, April darkness, and running for the terrace where

the drop was almost sheer to the rocks below, and she would have cheated him and died that night if she had not stumbled over a fir root and fallen. She reached the wall and was lifting herself over it when Parsloe caught her and dragged her back.

She struggled with him.

"Don't—don't! Oh, let me die, Jacob. I want to die."

He dragged her, weeping, back to the house.

"You little fool," he said; "I suppose I shall have to shut you up until your sanity returns."

CHAPTER VII

ABOUT nine o'clock next morning Lutterel grounded his boat in the inlet and stood watching the path. It was a perfect day, with the water lying like blue green glass above the dark patterning of the submerged rocks, and the tops of the pines above giving a more intense blue to the sky. The soft lapping of the sea made the boat grind gently on the shingle.

Lutterel waited for an hour, but no Elsie appeared upon the path. He sat in the stern sheets, he tramped about the strip of shingle, pulling out eventually to the rocks beyond the headland, and hoping to see her on the balcony. All that he saw was the woman Anna shaking a red rug from one of the windows.

He returned to the inlet, drew the dinghy well up on the shingle, and dared the path. His feeling was that Elsie was in hiding after the happenings of yesterday, that she was full of self reproaches, that she shirked facing the dear anguish of another day.

"I must see her," was his thought.

He reached the top of the path, rounded the rough stone pillar in which the wall ended, and came plump upon Parsloe who had been waiting for him there.

They looked at each other, and Lutterel knew why Elsie remained invisible. He saw her tragedy in Parsloe's heavy and threatening face.

They explained nothing; they justified nothing. The war between them was instant and open.

"I suggest that you keep your hands off other people's property."

"I did not know that she was your wife—till yesterday."

"So she fooled the lover as well as the husband. You need not worry. I think I am capable of making her regret it."

He stood there in all his arrogant clumsiness, a man prematurely aged, with the arteries knotted on his sallow temples. To Lutterel he was a creature of sacrilegious fat, of ungainly and looming anger.

"You were a cad to marry her."

"Indeed! But I—am—married to her, my young friend. Your hanging about here will hurt her more than it will hurt me or you."

They were very near to blows, but

Lutterel controlled himself, while the love in him hardened to fine steel.

"I might gather that—from the look of you. Good God! how I should hate you—if I——"

He saw the sullen blaze in Parsloe's eyes and turned back to the path to escape from the thought of killing. There was tenderness, a wild compassion at the back of his man's rage. For every word he uttered this other man would make her pay.

"Damn him!" he thought as he went down to the boat, "damn him; he shan't hurt her—if I can help it."

Lutterel did not look back, and if he had he would not have seen the other man leaning against the wall as though he had suddenly felt giddy. Parsloe's face was the colour of clay. His big, loose mouth with its flabby pinkness, was all awry. His eyes stared. He seemed to be listening to something that had happened inside himself. His lips moved. He stood up and away from the wall.

"I'm all right," he said to himself, "quite all right. I could have thrown that young brute into the sea."

Lutterel went back to the Villa Andrea.

"I've seen him," he said, "and I understand."

He sat sideways on the coping of the balustrade, looking towards the headland, while his mother pleaded for him, for herself, and for the girl.

"We'll go away, Geoff. You know how impossible such things are. Sometimes—when we break we can't mend."

"I mean to break—and mend."

"O, my dear!"

He went to her quickly, and kneeling down behind her chair, put his hands over her shoulders.

"Mater, I'd do most things for you; you know I would. But I won't leave her there—to that. I can't."

"It's a blind alley, dear."

"I'll face that. I must face it. Mater, will you stay here or will you go?"

She lay very still awhile, suffering and thinking.

"I think I'll go to Florence, Geoff. The Harkers are there. Will you take me to Florence?"

He nodded.

"But I shall have to come back. That's understood, mater?"

"Oh, my dear," she said, "if I could have saved you this!"

"But you couldn't," he answered her; "it has happened; perhaps it was meant to happen. Life must be like that."

So the Lutterels went to Florence, and Parsloe—who had made it his business to know something about the people at the Villa Andrea, was able to tell Elsie that her lover had gone away. He was keeping her locked in one of the lower rooms which had a huge old rusty grid over its window, giving her to understand that she would remain shut up there like a naughty child until she saw fit to behave as a wife and a reasonable being.

He meant to subdue her, and to so humiliate her that she should become the meek slave he coveted. This emotional experience might be turned to good account. He would so handle it that she would not need another.

The empty Villa Andrea gave him the chance to be superior and sneering. He gloated over the telling of its emptiness, nor was he wholly truthful.

"That is what your pup is worth. He

has run away and forgotten. I think I frightened him a little."

She sat and watched Parsloe with solemn and expressionless eyes.

"He saw you?"

"I met him on your favourite path, my dear Elsie, and he went down it in rather a hurry. You can rely on my promise that he will never come back."

She did not believe him. She could not have explained to Parsloe why she did not believe him, but she didn't. There were things that he would never understand.

But she felt very hopeless and weak, like one who has been sick, and who lacks the will either to die or to live. Her attitude to life was one of lassitude and apathy; she ceased to react; she ceased to care very much what happened.

One day she asked Parsloe to let her go out into the garden.

"Yes," he said, "if you promise—promise to be a good girl—and sensible."

"Oh—I promise," she said wearily.

It was the first sign of surrender, and his owl's face beamed with complacency. He even patted her shoulder and made as though to draw her to him, but feeling

her stiff young body straining away from his he had the sense to temporize. Now that she had put herself on the right path, a little humouring of her might be allowable.

"Go and get some fresh air, my dear. And to-morrow—perhaps—we will order the carriage."

She went out and sat listlessly in the sunshine, thinking how a whole age seemed to have passed over the earth since last she drove with her husband in that carriage.

At the end of a week, with the Villa Andrea remaining empty, and Elsie sinking deeper and deeper into a listless acquiescence, Jacob Parsloe felt himself triumphant. He grew careless. He began to regard his wife's love affair as the mere escapade of a child, and to believe that Lutterel had been no more serious than a boy amusing himself in someone else's orchard. He did not know that Lutterel was staying at an hotel in Santa Maria, and that he walked after dark to the Villa Andrea boat-house.

Lutterel was in the garden each night, waiting for his chance to speak with Elsie, and in time that chance came.

The moon was up, but Parsloe had never been a moon-man, and the lamp in the library shone on the heavy pallor of his face. Elsie had wandered out, and she was going towards the little classic temple at the end of the cypress walk when Lutterel came out from behind one of the trees.

"Elsie. Don't be afraid."

She gave a little cry of anguish and of joy.

"Geoff!"

"My darling!"

And then, to his great amazement, she leaned against one of the cypresses, clasping the bole and hiding her face against it.

"Don't touch me, dear; I'm—I'm not fit to be touched by you."

"Elsie——!"

"No, no, he has made me——"

He felt the trembling of her, the sobbing breath in her throat, and his love would not be held off.

"Elsie. Tell me, anything, everything."

"I can't," she said.

"Oh, my dear, don't you know that you can tell me anything. I love you."

His arms were the compelling and tender arms of a lover, and she could not hold out against him. She put up her face to be kissed, and then hid herself in him and against him.

"Geoff, he has been horrible to me."

"My darling! Tell me."

She felt him stiffen, felt his arms tighten, about her. It was the anger of the lover: a generous and fierce anger, full of compassion and scorn. He pressed his lips against her hair.

"That settles it," he said; "you are coming away with me."

"Oh, Geoff, I daren't."

"But I dare. You are coming away with me for ever and ever, away from all this. You must."

It took him an hour to persuade her, but when he left her she had promised to meet him at nine o'clock the following night. He was going back to Santa Maria to make arrangements and buy tickets. They would catch the night train for Genoa and Paris.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME time next morning Luigi told Parsloe that a man had taken a boat out of the Villa Andrea boat-house on the previous night.

"I think it was the young Inglese, signor. I could not go too close for fear he might hear or see."

Parsloe raged, but his rage was an inward rage, and the beast in him grew cunning. He let the day pass as though there were no cloud in the sky, but he spent it in watching Elsie for any sign of secret fear.

At lunch, and with an air of almost genial playfulness, he suggested that they should order the carriage that evening and go to dine at Santa Maria. He observed her narrowly, and he noticed the frightened clouding of her eyes. She was too sensitive, too tremulous with suppressed emotion, to meet him with a face of brass.

"I'm rather tired. Another night."

He let the matter drop, but his savage jealousy grew more sure.

"Very well, my dear," and he smiled, "we will spend a little quiet evening at home. Just you and I."

She was frightened. It hurt her to deceive him, perhaps because she loathed him so thoroughly; the whole business made her feel sordid and horrible. But did he suspect? She dared not think of what might happen if he suspected, and she clung desperately to the prospect of her flight. She longed for it now with all youth's passion for sincerity. It would be a clean act, wholesome, and final, and it would put an end to this gross make-believe.

She was agitated, overstrung. She dared not remain near him, and she spent the afternoon lying on the couch in her room, pretending that she had a headache.

At dinner Parsloe was almost jocose, and for a little while she was deceived by his playfulness, but before the meal was over he had begun his dagger thrusts. He tortured her, and she flinched before him.

"A beautiful night, my dear. I suggest that we sit in the garden and look at the moon."

"I think I shall go to bed," she faltered.

She realized that he was watching her with eyes of mockery and of menace.

"Oh, nonsense. Now—if I were a young man!"

"Please, I'm so tired."

"I see," he said, "I see. I must take care that you do not overtire yourself to-night."

At the end of the meal he rose with an air of looming grimness, and held out his arm.

"Come upstairs to the library. I'll read to you."

She went. She began to be possessed by the horror of the knowledge that he knew, and that he was playing some monstrous game with her. The lamp had been lit in the library. He followed her in and locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

He knew.

She sat down in a chair, while he remained standing by the table. She knew that the crisis had come, and some-

thing in her bade her resist, struggle, make one fight against the looming and arrogant mass of his tyranny. She noticed that there was a stick lying on the table, and that the windows to the balcony were open.

"Jacob," she said, "please unlock that door."

She was astonished at the level quietness of her own voice.

"Why?"

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"I am going away—with him."

"You think so!"

"Please," she said, "if I don't go I shall die."

She had seen him angry, but never such anger as she saw now. His face seemed to swell up, its mouth wide open, its eyes like dull glass. He roared at her; he picked up the stick which lay on the table.

She sprang up as he clutched at her. An overturned chair lay between them, and suddenly she saw the furious figure falter as though something had broken within it. Its face grew flaccid. It made a groping gesture with one hand, searching

for the table, rested for the moment with fingers spread upon it, and then fell sideways. It seemed to crumple up; it slipped to the floor.

She stood staring. Then she stooped over him, felt for the key, and finding it, unlocked the door and fled down the stairs.

"Anna," she called, "Anna."

The woman's face showed below.

"Anna—the signor is ill; he has had a fit or something; come and help me."

Together they returned to the room, and between them they lifted Parsloe and laid him on the sofa. He was conscious, but paralysed; he made some sort of noise in his throat; he kept blinking his eyes at them; his face was all drawn to one side.

"It is a fit, signora."

Elsie was standing between the lamp and the door, and as she made a movement towards the door she found Parsloe's eyes fixed on her. They were full of intelligence, and they had become soft, agonized, questioning. She understood. He thought that she was going to her lover, that she was deserting him even as he deserved to be deserted.

She covered her face and went out.

"I have killed him," she thought, "and in his way he must have loved me."

She went unsteadily down the stairs and out into the moonlit garden, and when Lutterel met her she fell into his arms and clung to him.

"Oh, Geoff, Geoff, he has had a stroke; he is dying. I told him—I told him——"

She was beyond herself, and he carried her to a stone seat and held her as though she were a child.

"You told him!"

"Yes—I think he knew. I told him that I should die if I did not go away with you, and then he raged at me. And suddenly—he fell down. He is paralysed."

He rocked her in his arms.

"Poor Elsie; poor darling."

But in a little while her soul came back to her. She broke gently from him and sat beside him on the seat, very solemn and pale, her eyes looking straight out over the sea.

"Geoff," she said, "do you understand? Can—you understand?"

"Tell me."

"That—I can't leave him now. I don't

know why, but that is how I feel. He has been horrible to me, and now he is helpless. Oh, how life hurts one!"

He put an arm gently about her neck and drew her head so that it lay against his cheek.

"What do you want me to do, Elsie?"

"Take your boat and go for a doctor."

"I'll go," he said.

Dull, driven by a strange sense of the inevitable, she returned to the house and the library where Anna was sitting on a chair beside the sofa. She was instantly conscious of Parsloe's eyes. They watched her enter the room; they expressed astonishment, and something more than astonishment. She knew that he had not expected to see her again.

She approached the couch.

"I have sent for the doctor. Do you understand?"

He blinked his eyelids, and she understood that it meant "yes," and sitting down near him, she folded her hands in her lap and waited.

CHAPTER IX

THE doctor came about midnight. He was a Lombard: tall, serious, with a fine head and quiet eyes. Elsie stood beside him while he examined her husband and made a diagnosis that was almost self-evident.

"How old is he?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered; "sixty, perhaps. He never told me."

The Lombard drew her aside on to the balcony and began to speak in his gentle, pleasant voice.

"You understand Italian—yes? It is a case of cerebral bleeding, bleeding into the brain. You understand?"

She nodded.

"He must not be moved. You will have to put up a bed in this room; he must have plenty of pillows. You will need a nurse."

"I will nurse him," she said.

"Signora, such cases are not easy; he is a heavy man."

"The woman will help me."

There was a short silence between them, while the Lombard stroked his short beard and looked at the stars and the sea. He felt that the figure beside him was trying to ask him a question; he glanced at her; he saw her lips move. He divined what she wanted to ask him.

"I do not know yet. To-morrow—perhaps—I shall be able to tell."

She bent her head.

"He will never be——?"

"No—he will never be the same. If he lives some power may come back, how much I cannot say. He may not be able to speak. It is right that you should be told."

"Thank you," she said; "thank you."

He moved back into the room, stood looking at Parsloe for some seconds, nodded at him kindly and turned towards the door. Elsie followed him; his eyes had told her that he had more to say to her; and she went with him down the stairs.

"I will come early to-morrow morning."

I shall bring what is necessary. There are certain dangers which you will have to guard against."

"Please tell me."

He gave her simple directions for the nursing of such a case, bowed to her with natural dignity, and left her to face a dimly foreshadowed martyrdom.

But first she went to the head of the path leading to the inlet, and here she found Lutterel waiting in the moonlight. She felt a sudden passionate pity for him, far more pity than she felt for herself.

"Poor Geoff, you must be so tired."

She was very calm, and her calmness dominated him. She seemed to have drawn apart, and sensitively he understood that she was not to be touched.

"How is he?"

"It is a paralytic stroke. He may recover; he may not. The doctor cannot tell me yet."

He heard the sound of her breathing.

"Geoff, I must stay. Come to me—tomorrow. Oh, try to understand."

He bent and kissed one of her hands.

"Elsie—I understand. God bless you."

Sleep was very far from her, and when

they had done all that could be done, she sent Anna to bed.

"I shall watch. If I need you I will call you."

She knew that the woman's sullen eyes accused her of having caused this tragedy, but she was not hurt by the injustice of the accusation, for she had chosen to sit by this heavily breathing body of a living death. What greater restitution could she make?

To remain, watched by those helpless eyes, held there by some instinct which she did not question though it caused her a dull anguish! She sat through those slow hours, sometimes rising to moisten Parsloe's lips or to raise his head upon the pile of pillows. She shrank from him; it cost her an effort to touch him, and yet she did it.

"How strange!" she thought; "how little we can foresee what will happen within ourselves! I give up everything—for what?"

She had begun by sitting near the window where Parsloe could not see her, but soon she became aware that he was restless. He made queer noises, like a dumb beast, trying to make itself under-

stood. She rose, and moved her chair so that he could see her.

"Is that what you wish?"

He blinked his eyes. He wanted to look at her, but she began to realize that he looked at her in a different way, not as the bully and the possessor, but more like a child. A pang shot through her. That look of his seemed to doom her to another sort of slavery.

Yet she acquiesced, feeling the inevitableness of her acquiescence, and when the dawn came she spoke to him gently and went out into the garden. She watched the sun come up over the sea, thinking as she watched it that one can never be sure of what another dawn will bring, and how different the reality may be from the reality of our dreams. She should have been with that other man, her lover, gliding northwards to the green of an English spring.

She bowed her head. She was very weary, and yet she knew that some other strength was bearing her along.

"I may lose him," she thought; "he will go away; I must make him go away—until——"

She struggled here like one breathlessly climbing the last steep slope of some height.

"Yes; he must go. Perhaps he will understand. But will he ever come back to me?"

She knelt and prayed that Lutterel's love might last.

CHAPTER X

THE doctor came. He examined Parsloe, and then asked to speak with Elsie in the room below. He looked at the dead whiteness of her suffering face and at the shadows under her eyes.

"Signora——"

She wondered what he was going to say to her.

"He is better?"

"I think he will live."

She folded cold, spirit hands over the burning love within. She looked at him with eyes of tragedy.

"How long?" she asked.

He half turned away; he was aware of the tragic cry behind that question.

"I can't say. A month, a year, ten years. It may depend on—you, signora."

"On me!"

Her hands were pressed to her bosom.

"Yes; he must live very quietly, without emotion, without excitement. Gently. No worries; no shocks."

She stood very still. Her eyes had a blind look as though her vision was turned inward upon a world of renunciation, anguish, patience, and suspense.

"I will do my best" she said.

She felt that she was closing a door, the door of her own heart.

When the doctor had gone she went out into the garden, knowing that she would find Lutterel there waiting to hear his fate. The morning was fragrant, and as she passed through all the half wild beauty of the garden she prayed that he would be gentle with her and that he would not plead passionately with her to surrender everything and go away with him. She felt that she could not bear the pain of withstanding him, perhaps of seeing him leave her with impatience and in anger.

She saw the boat lying on the shingle, but Lutterel was not to be seen. She called, softly, like a sad bird calling its mate.

"Geoff—Geoff, where are you?"

His voice answered from the cypresses above.

"Here. Shall I come to you?"

"Wait there," she said.

She found him walking up and down between the rows of cypresses, and when he saw her rising out of the undergrowth which masked the path, he came slowly towards her like a man walking in a church. He was master of himself; she knew that at once. His eyes looked at her with a tenderness which hovered but did not touch. His love had the greatness of a sensitive restraint, and when she realized it she was grateful.

"Elsie, you have had no sleep."

She gave him the ghost of a smile.

"And you?"

"I have been thinking hard," he said.

His eyes waited on her, and with a light touch of the fingers he guided her to the little white temple. They sat down here on the semi-circular stone seat, and the white pillars cut the blue of sea and sky. There was a humming of insects everywhere, and among the olives on the hill behind them a man was singing.

Lutterel held her hand.

"Tell me," he said.

"The doctor thinks he will live. He will be helpless; everything will depend on me."

"Elsie!"

She held his hand firmly.

"Geoff, help me. I cannot leave him now. He is what he is—but could I leave him there—helpless—and go away? Should we be happy? Should I be happy? My dear, I love you, and yet I cannot go."

He sat very still. His arm crept up until his open hand clasped her head, and drawing it gently, made it rest against his head. They remained thus, cheek against cheek.

"Elsie—what makes you feel like this?"

"I don't know," she said; "I don't know. Perhaps it is because I love you so much, and my love will not let me do a thing which I could never forget. Do you understand?"

"Yes," he said; "I think I understand."

He turned his face and softly kissed her hair.

"Dear, it is because I love you as I do that I understand; and, though it hurts me, I love you for your fineness, your generosity."

"Oh, Geoff," she said, "I'm not fine—really. Something drives me."

"A second martyrdom," he said sadly, "a second martyrdom. Perhaps it is

because I am a bit of a woman that I understand."

They remained for a while in silence, cheek to cheek.

"Elsie," he said presently, "I shall wait."

He felt a slight tremor pass through her.

"Geoff, it won't be fair to you. Time changes things. And, oh—my dear—I couldn't bear——"

"What couldn't you bear?" he asked.

"To live here on a promise, feeling that you were tied. Don't promise me anything."

Again he kissed her hair and with a man's reverence.

"Very well; I'll make you no spoken promise, Elsie, but I want you to make me one."

"What is it, Geoff?"

"That you will write to me—when—when you are free. Just three words: 'It is over.' Promise me this."

"I promise," she said.

CHAPTER XI

Six months passed, and Jacob Parsloe remained a wreck. He had regained the partial use of one arm and leg, but he was unable to walk or to lift himself out of bed or out of a chair, and he had to be dressed, washed and fed. In the old days he had been accustomed to boast of his vocabulary, and he had been left with three words — "Elsie" — "Sorry" — and "Atomical," a queer three-belled peal upon which he had to ring the changes. He understood all that was said to him, and in time Elsie grew extraordinarily quick in divining his wants and in supplying them.

She nursed him with great conscientiousness and some kindness, and he was unhappy when she was out of his sight.

But Parsloe the paralytic was different from Parsloe the philosopher. The change was there, and Elsie felt it, and in his way he would manage to make her feel

it. His eyes expressed a sort of surprised gentleness.

Her way of communicating with him was the method of trial by error. When he wished to tell her something he would utter her name—"Elsie," and repeat it several times, and she would begin her catechism. "You want the shutters closed. You want me to read to you. You would like a drink. Your pillows aren't comfortable. You want me to go for a walk, for a drive." His "sorry" meant yes, his "atomical" no. But what she began to discover was that he was thinking far more of her and less of himself. Often and often his thoughts concerned her pleasure or her comfort, and she was hard put to it to find out what he wanted her to do.

"Am I to go to Santa Maria?"

"Sorry, sorry."

"Am I to buy something?"

"Sorry."

"For you?"

"Atomical, atomical."

"For myself?"

"Sorry, sorry."

"A dress? Anything that pleases me?"

"Sorry, sorry."

She was touched. She realized that the helpless mass of tissue held another sort of man from the man who had been her husband. In his helpless, stammering way he wanted to make things up to her.

Yet, she did not realize how strong this feeling was until he made her understand that he wished his English lawyer to come out to Italy. She had to write a letter for him, and the lawyer came.

She was not present at the interview between them, for Parsloe had intimated that he wished her to be absent. She had prompted the solicitor as to the method of procedure, warning him that he would have to go on asking questions until he asked the right ones and got the required answers. He understood.

And Parsloe made his will.

"I shall not live long. I want to leave everything to my wife."

"Unconditionally?"

"Sorry," said the man on the bed.

CHAPTER XII

ANNA—not the sullen Anna of old—had said to her that morning: "The signora looks beautiful in black." Her mirror repeated all that Anna said, making much of her bronze head and the cream of her skin in contrast to that simple sheath of black.

She looked at herself in the mirror with an air of questioning aloofness.

"That is you, Elsie—a widow! Does it matter how you look?"

A week ago she had written that letter, "It is over"; just that brief message and no more, and for seven silent days she had waited, and no message had come to her in return.

Had he forgotten? Had he ceased to care? She wondered; always, she had made herself ask this question, braving it as she had learnt to brave other things which a woman must face. She was glad that she had refused to let him make her a promise, sorrowfully glad, but now she knew that she wanted him as she had never wanted him before. A year's sacri-

face was at an end. It had left her empty, lonely, with nothing to do.

Would he come?

She protested that she did not know.

That eighth morning she spent in the garden, wandering along the familiar paths, and renewing the many memories that the garden held for her. She sat on the stone seat in the little white temple; she descended the path to the rocky inlet where she had helped to save Lutterel from the sea.

"It all happened a year ago," said a voice within. "Does he remember it as I do remember it?"

She passed the afternoon sitting in one of the great, cool rooms with the shutters closed, and a book on her knee, but she did not read. She was too conscious of time, of the hours which carried her with them as they flowed away towards some unknown night or dawn. Her heart beat out the day like a clock, another day, a voiceless day, empty of all happening. She was calm; she clung to this calmness, she even wrapped it about her like a nun's garment, telling herself that she might need it and nothing else.

After tea she walked again in the garden, making of it a cloister in which her thoughts were unvexed by doubts and yearnings. She refused to let herself look towards the coast road from Santa Maria, that dusty white thread winding in and out at the foot of the cliffs. She would not let herself question the silence of that outer world, or wonder whether its silence had the finality of death.

Towards evening she returned to the house. She opened the shutters and sat down by her window. She could see the rocks, and the quiet sea with the sunlight touching it, but the sun was near the hills, and another day was dying.

"He has forgotten," she thought. "He does not wish to remember."

And then, suddenly, she sat erect, pale, listening. She had heard the sound of a bell, the bell at the gate, and the clatter of Anna's footsteps as she crossed the hall and went down into the garden.

An age seemed to pass; she felt faint, dizzy.

Then, she heard his voice in the hall, the voice of her lover.

END

APPLE TREES

WARWICK DEEPING

APPLE TREES

William Wynter paused on the crown of a hill in Sussex and saw the Weald in its young greenness under and April sky. He saw it as Sussex in the Spring, Kipling's Sussex, Roman Anderida, Sussexes of the bland South Saxons, Normal William and his harnessed host, and King Harold lying dead amid his housecarls on Senlac Hill. The Iron Masters and their furnaces had passed away, though Hammer Ponds might remain, and a new generation of trees had come into being. A train trailed a plume of smoke along the bottom of a valley, and a larch wood stood in embattled and incipient greenness upon a rounded hill. In the distance lay the dimness of the Downs and the southern sea.

Wynter carried a pack upon his back. He was a lean, dark lad, with eyes that suggested that he had suffered from some unresolved fear. He wore a green pullover, a white shirt open at the neck, khaki shorts and brown shoes. A field gate beckoned him, and he went to lean upon it, arms folded, head held high, yet ever in repose his colourful figure suggested a sensitive restlessness. This hiking holiday was more than a mere holiday, and those who passed him on the road might not have guessed that it was a pilgrimage in search of peace. Down yonder he saw a huddle of houses about a church tower and the grey remnants of some monastic building. That would be Harrowfield. He had marked it on his map, and he proposed to pass the night there in some country pub. The Abbey of Holy Thorn. The Crown of Thorns ! And suddenly his sensitive face seemed to wince with some secret pain. How poignantly that piece of symbolism expressed the inevitable martyrdom of man. Christ upon the Cross. Was not the modern tragedy implicit in the fact that Man had deserted God, not God -- man ?

For, this very pack of his might also be symbolic, in that he carried fear upon his shoulders, for William Wynter, the young idealist, had gone to fight in the Spanish War, and found fear there before being buried by a German bomb. He had been lucky to make England again, thanks to the help of an English ship, but that bomb had left a psychic wound in him that would not heal.

As he stood leaning upon the gate, he recalled his last meeting with his London specialist. And had the psychologist replaced the priest ? " Your case is in your own hands -- now, Wynter. And when I say hands I mean hands. More doing that thinking. The idea is to sink your subconscious in simpler soil."

Strange phrase -- that ! Had the soil a subconscious content of its own ? And then words of his own came back to him.

" You must be pretty sick of such cases, doctor. A rotten neurasthenic."

The other man had smiled at him.

" My job, and then the other fellow's. Some day you will find your sick self slipping from your shoulders. Get away from cities and the bitter streets, and all the silly fuss and frenzy of this modern world. Go and find God in an apple tree."

Wynter remembered himself laughing over that fantastic phrase. God in an Apple Tree ! Or Eden without Eve and the Serpent ?

He left the field-gate and walked on down a long and gradual hill, past a farm house, and a wood of larch and beech trees to be confronted by another gate. It was an old and decrepit gate, green with mould, and rusty as to hinges, but it was the picture beyond the gate between its thorn hedges which brought him to a stand still. He was looking at a vast old orchard, shaggy apple-trees, row upon row, with grassed aisles between them. Some

of the trees leaned this way, others that. Some had fallen and lay dead or dying. The gestures of their spreading branches were somehow human. They might have been very old men turned into gnarled trees by some Sussex Merlin.

An old man, one Thomas Lavender, came up the hill using a stick that was like a pastoral staff. He had very blue eyes in an apostolic face, and the back of his neck was creased leather. Tom and his wife had a cottage down the road, and they lived upon the proceeds of a largish garden, their old age pensions and odd jobs, but in the spirit Tom Lavender was more than an odd-jobber.

Wynter, turning his head, saw Sussex as a patriarch, and smiled at it, and old Tom smiled back, though the gentlemen might be no more than a hitch-hiker who couldn't tell a pippin from a codlin.

"Good day to 'ee, sir. Be you looking at them old trees?"

Wynter turned full face to him, and Thomas Lavender's shrewd eyes saw more than a young man in a colourful jumper and brown shorts. This strange gentleman had what Tom would call one of those funny, twingy faces that could go dark like a shuttered lantern, or a window when the wind blew the shadow of a bough across it.

"Yes. Very old trees, aren't they?"

Tom crossed the grass verge to the gate.

"You be right, sire. Nigh on a hundred -- some of 'em. A bit spooky to some folks at night. You'd should see 'em by moonlight."

Wynter turned full face to the gate. Why should anyone be afraid of trees?

"Anyone live here?"

"No ssir, not since old Jack Carter hanged hisself on that there tree.

You can see a bit of rope there.”

Looking at the lyre-shaped tree, Wynter’s shoulders seem to hunch themselves.

“ Why ? ”

“ Sick man he was ssir, and he’d had no luck. It was me as found him.”

“ You did ? ”

“ Yes, gave me knock in the belly, it did. Knowed poor old Jack for thirty years or more.”

There was silence for a few seconds, and Wynter’s eyes were widely open.

“ Is that why no one lives here ? ”

“ Maybe so, ssirr -- lot of money and hard work and p’raps - poor old Jack’s ghost might scare ‘em.”

Fear ! Fear had become men’s curse and his scourge, whipping to hatred and mistrust of his fellows. There could be a wrong fear and a right fear. Wynter’s eyes were fixed upon that shred of rope. He could picture the body hanging there, perhaps turning slowly like a joint upon a spit, its swollen and turgid face now in the sunlight, and then in the shadow. Tom Lavender’s blue eyes were set in a stare, for he too was back in the past, and remembering yet another horror, a carrion crow perched on the dead thing’s shoulder and pecking at its eyes. Disturbed, the bird had gone flapping and squawking down one of the orchard aisles, and old Tom had felt sick in this stomach.

But he did not tell this to the man beside him, for Thomas Lavender had a countryman’s candour, who shoved some things in a hold and covered ‘em up, and said newt about them.

Wynter straightened beside him, his hand on the gate.

“ I suppose someone owns the orchard ? ”

“ Sure-ly ssir. It be Abbey property. But Sir Ignatius, he be a particular gentleman.”

“ Wouldn't it be worthwhile ? -- I mean -- it seems rather cruel and wasteful to let those old trees rot.”

Thomas Lavender's blue eyes opened wide, for Wynter was saying what he had often said or thought.

“ Well, it be, ssir, to my way of thinkin'. But then -- y'see, things be'n't what they used to be.”

“ How ? ”

Tom passed the back of a tanned hand across an almost ascetic mouth.

“ Growin' things don't pay. Apples rot on the grass. All this furrin stuff comin' in. Maybe I'd call it murder, but they y'are.”

Wynter nodded.

“ Yes. I suppose it is easier to buy fruit in tins over the counter than to grow it.”

“ You be right, ssir.”

There was another pause and then Wynter asked a question.

“ Could that orchard come back to life ? ”

“ It could, ssir, and I'd call that a good job.”

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When Thomas Lavender had limped on up the hill, helping his rusty leg with his stick, Wynter stood hesitant, his hands resting upon the upper bar of the gate. Should he or should he not climb the barrier and explore the orchard and its cottage? Nor were these old trees mere trees, but fantastic symbols of a world in which man suffered wounds and martyrdom, a world of fear, and the violence and cruelty that fear breeds. Someone has said that only those who are slightly mad are capable of being supremely sane. And what was sanity in a world that strutted madly towards mass-murder and sadism?

“Find yourself in an apple tree.”

Only a profound and subtle healer could have uttered such words, so full of phantasy and sensitive comprehension. How some of the intellectuals might laugh at them, men to whom sex was no more than meat in a butcher's shop, and God a ridiculous old guy, and the product of auto-suggestion. Were not these ancient trees symbols of a World in which the old were left to rot, and all glory was for the violent and young? So, William Wynter, one of those incorrigible dreamers who had suffered in the Spanish War, and been buried by a German bomb, stood there feeling the strange surge of inward provocations. Had Mathieson's words been prophetic? Was this meeting with a Sussex orchard mere coincidence, or did some otherness guide your feet?

The impulse became positive. He dropped his pack over the gate, and climbing its sagging timbers carefully, he became a trespasser, and as he did so a strange sense of sureness came to him. He might have stepped into another world, green, remote, tranquil. Why -- fear? He made himself go

and stand beneath that fatal bough, and touch the shred of rope, that relic of despair and weariness. It sent a thrill through his fingers. Grasp fear and it vanished. Be but a little mad, and your madness may become inspiration.

The trees were growing in the matted felt of last year's uncut grass and weeds, and the ghosts of thistles, dock, ragwort and fat-hen made a miniature jungle growth. The place was trackless, and he had to wade towards the white fence, and the deserted cottage beyond it. There were other fruit trees here, neglected pears, and plums, and a vast standard cherry. The thatch of the cottage looked like a mangy pelt, with holes in it where birds had nested, and an overhanging bough of the cherry had clawed the straw away in one corner. The casement windows were shut, and here and there the diamond of glass was missing. The two dormers in the roof were tilted towards each other. A timbered porch sagged over a door that had once been green, and all the ground about the place was a wild tangle of weeds.

The voice of sanity would have said -- "Impossible", and sanity would have turned its back upon such a ruin, but William Wynter was above sanity. The white gate hung open and he walked up what had been a brick path to the door.

Sanity would have said -- "My dear idiot, it will be locked," but the door was not locked. It gave to his hand with a rusty sigh. Some dust fell. He found himself in a little, silent, empty room. There were damp patches on the peeling walls, and some plaster had fallen from the ceiling, and the duck's-nest grate, rusty and grim, contained rubble that had rattled down the chimney. Two cupboards flanked the fireplace, and one door hung open, and Wynter, exploring, saw two objects on a dusty shelf -- an empty tobacco

tin, and a Bible. Strange, incongruous relics ! Wynter picked up the dusty Bible, and opening it, found an inscription in rough and simple writing :

John Carter -- his book.

My Mary died these two days before Michaelmas.

She was a good woman, God bless her.

Just heard as Tom has been killed in France.

I be all alone now.

God's will be done.

And at the bottom of the page :

I be afraid -- God help me.

Wynter took out a handkerchief and dusted the book, and then returned it to the cupboard shelf. Poor old John Carter -- alone, and weary and fearful ! Did fear still lurk about this deserted cottage, with the bats and the rats, and the birds in the thatch ? The stillness was supreme, and somehow it was not the frozen stillness of fear. The sun was painting patterns on the floor, and Wynter, moving slowly and almost reverently, went to explore the rest of the cottage. He found a brick paved kitchen, and old iron grate, a bread oven, and a cob-webbed sink. Steep, boxed in stairs led him to two dusty bedrooms with their dormers looking upon the orchard. Their floors were brittle with the crumbling plaster from the ceilings.

Re-descending, he opened a back door, and found himself in a weedy, brick-paved yard. He saw a well-winch with a rusty chain hanging, two

black and rotting water-buts, their staves gaping, and a little brick privy and a wood store. Ivy was streaming all over these adjuncts, and had hung green curtains over their doors.

According to modern standards, and in comparison with some rough-cast, raw-tiled bungalow with ornamental glass in its cheap front door, the place was hopeless. No gas, no electric light, no piped water, no hygiene, and any intelligent woman would have scorned its primitive crudity, and yet for Wynter it stood for some of the older fundamentals. Even that forgotten, dusty old book had words to utter -- " By the sweat of man's brow ---- ". Here, there had been the labour of human hands, kindling to be cut, faggots piled in the bread oven, water to be drawn from the well, lamps cleaned and lit, the fruits of the earth gathered, all the essential simplicities of an older and perhaps a happier world. No labour-saving gadgets here. Yes, and how strange that modern man should look upon labour as a curse, and almost as an affront to his reach-me-down dignity. Had the cinema and the wireless made him happier or wiser? Was he satisfied with the snippets and a little facile information, instead of gathering a simpler wisdom of his own? Get rid of mere drudgery, yes, but man might yet be whipped by fate into acknowledging the inevitableness of effort and wholesome toil.

Wynter lifted the flap of the well. Almost it fell to pieces as he raised it, and deep below he saw a great, gleaming round black eye. It did not wink at him, but stared -- as in profound surprise -- at a strange man who had disturbed its sleep. Had anyone lowered a bucket into that still water since poor old Jack Carter had hanged himself? Some impulse moved Wynter to pick up a fragment of broken brick which lay among the weeds, and drop it into the well. The plop echoed up to him, and the dark circle broke into

dim wrinkles, and he remained kneeling and watching until the water had regained its glassy stillness.

As he lowered the creaking lid, the thought came to him that water was quick to recover its tranquillity, but that when some super Devil-Man flung a stone into the world's pit, a murderous and violent upheaval could spread all over the world. The modern nexus was too sensitive. Or -- it was like a vast ammunition dump which roared heavenwards, and detonated other dumps. Was the modern world too crowded and too competitive? Had it remained Arcadian, and on the scale of the cottage well, catastrophic things might have been less possible. Yes, but man's destiny seemed to be otherwise.

When Wynter had re-closed the cottage door, he wandered for a while up and down the orchard. It appeared vast to him, almost limitless in its protracted and spacious wildness. He counted one row of trees, fifty-three times, and somehow all of them were different and with an individual pattern of their own. They lived in a community, and yet they differed, and were as distinct as citizens in an ancient state, not mass-produced man. Or were they like a band of Vikings or Elizabethan adventurers, armed for battle with the winds and frosts? Old they might be, but they had strength and pride and purpose.

Wynter had forgotten his pack. He had left it lying by the gate, and he swung it to the other side to save pressure on the frail timber, and as he humped it on his shoulders, he glanced at the lyre-shaped tree. A light breeze had risen, and the grey and stoney stillness of the trees changed to movement. A glimmer of green buds seemed to hail him in the Spring, and there was a murmuring as though fingers touched invisible strings. A smile came into the man's eyes. He raised a hand to the orchard.

II

The road dipped towards Harrowfield, and then rose in graceful curves like a coiled rope thrown at the church tower. Old elms and yews patterned the sky. A small white house was the first building to greet Wynter as he climbed the hill. It had green shutters, a cornice, a low slated roof, and two slim white pillars supporting a porch, and its garden was protected by somewhat severe iron railings and a closely clipped laurel hedge. Wynter was passing it with a casual glance when he heard a woman's voice, a throaty and admonitory voice which came from one of the upper windows.

"Rach-el, Rach-el, come away from the gate."

Wynter's casual glance had missed the figure behind the iron bars, but he had a momentary glimpse of a dark head, and a sensitive little face, and two hands clasping the bars. Moreover, even in that fortuitous moment he got the impression of a creature behind bars, like a frightened bird clinging to the wires of a cage.

"Rach-el, do you hear me ? "

The tonsillar voice was more hortatory, and Wynter, pausing, saw a woman at an upper window, a woman with a sleek black head, a round, fat, pasty face adorned with heavily rimmed spectacles. His glance passed to the girl. She was wearing a kind of plain brown over-all, and her hair was clipped close, like a boy's.

"Rach-el, -- I have called your name twice."

Wynter saw the child's hands slip from the gate. She turned and walked away up the path, and Wynter, whose sight was keen, saw that she had a hole in one black stocking. The woman's fat and dominant face still loomed in the window.

Wynter was about to pass on when he noticed the house's name registered in black upon a cream panel attached to one brick pillar.

" Mon Repos."

He was conscious of an ironic twinge. Could the owner of that voice and face and looming glasses claim such tranquillity ?

III

Harrowfield made William Wynter think of some Italian or Spanish town in a white cluster upon a hill, with the grey shape of a castle or monastery crowning it, save that Harrowfield's chaplet was red. About the great grey gateway of the Abbey and the Tudor Guest-House, the little town spread a Georgian flavour, and " The George " was its principal inn. Solid and square, with white door frame and window sashes ; a John Bull of a building, and bearing upon its sign either the figure of the Farmer King or his more fat and flamboyant son. An old shop with bow windows confronted it across the way, a more feminine building, with a suggestion of hooped petticoats and piled and powdered hair.

Yet, " The George " had conformed to the more modern traditions. Its great coach-house had become a garage. It offered you the Holy Trinity in the guise of Bars, Public, Saloon, Private, and Wynter, who was a shy creature, chose the more anonymous privacy of publicity.

A pretty, dark young woman was polishing glasses in an empty bar. She was one of the three Georgian sisters whom a local wag had christened Harrowfield's Three Graces. Her name was Marie, and she looked at the man with the pack with a gleam of tolerant mischief in her eyes. The father of these three Joys bore the name of Merry, James Merry, and merry they were

in this somewhat sober little Sussex town.

Wynter, holding the door open with one hand, saw her as some Spanish girl, and a momentary muteness caused her to smile at him more comprehendingly. No crashing, come hither young fellow-my-lad this, but a queer creature who looked at you as though any pretty girl had an odour of saintliness, which was so.

“ Can I help you, sir ? ”

Her voice was as rich as her comeliness, and Wynter, with a sudden smile, slipped in through the door.

“ Could I put up here ? ”

She appeared to consider both him and the question with a dark seriousness that had no glad-eye in it.

“ I think so, sir. You had better see my father. You will find him in the office.”

Now, Mr. James Merry might be a man of Georgian flavour, the husband of a buxom wife and the father of three comely daughters, but he could and did exercise a discriminating and paternal authority.

So, Mr. James Merry took a look at Wynter through the office door, and being a man of some acumen and wisdom, saw this shy creature as one of those rather eccentric and sensitive gentlemen who carry a pen or a painter's brush like an aesthetic baton in a knapsack.

“ A room, sir ? Yes. We have one.”

Jim Merry had manners, and a shrewd brown eye that could be black to cheeky bounders.

“ Thank you.”

“ A quiet room, sir ? ”

“ Yes.”

"Over the garden. Will you be staying long?"

"Perhaps a few days. I rather like this place."

Mr. Merry rather liked the gentleman. He did not delegate him to one of his daughters, but conducted him up a broad staircase with mahogany rail, and introduced him to a little back room papered with pink roses and blue garlands. The window overlooked the George garden, and there were early tulips in flower, and a pear tree burgeoning into white blossom.

"How will this suit you, sir?"

"Admirably."

"Tea in the lounge, sir. Dinner at half past seven."

Wynter was smiling at the garden scene. He unslung his pack, and lowered it to a chair. He was thinking -- "I can sleep here," -- for sleep had been elusive during his long illness, and broken nights are not good for haunted souls.

It was Miss Joan Merry who carried tea-trays into the lounge, and with no air of accepting servility through service. Joan was more of a minx than her sisters, and she gave William Wynter a glad eye with his tea tray, but finding no Adam to her Eve, she became nicely decorous. A shy bird -- this, and somehow not quite man, though potently a gentleman, the sort of sensitive fellow who became embarrassed when a girl showed forwardness. Miss Joan Merry returned to the Still Room, and giggled to her sister Millicent.

"Seen the latest?"

Millicent was the romantic member of the trio, and falling in love and out of it with happy facility.

"No."

"Fair Isle pullover and brown shorts. Looked scared when I gave him the

glad eye."

"He would."

"Now -- now ! -- Quite your type, my lass. Go and have a peep at him."

"Why should I ? "

"Why should anyone be anything ? "

But Miss Millicent did glide into the lounge and survey its population, and the new-comer in particular. William Wynter was lying back in his chair and gazing at the ceiling while his long, lean fingers fiddled with a pipe. He might have been seeing pictures on the ceiling, or have sunk into poetic absorption, and the youngest Miss Merry thought him rather quaint and interesting. Quaint and picturesque were very much the adjective of her vocabulary at the moment. One of her ambitions was to have her portrait painted by a real live artist, and Mr. Fair Isle rather looked the part.

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William Wynter strolled, and was stared at, but being more conscious of the adequacy of Harrowfield than of the human interest he aroused, he remained unconscious of gapes and giggles. The modern world was like that. Little wenches, educated in the art of wearing stockings, and little else, were provoked to mirth by the sight of a sunshade or a full length frock. Anything outside the very limited area of their experience was just " Snob ", and their little complacencies tittered and passed remarks that might be too audible. Three motor-coaches from Westling's had unloaded a bevy of these gigglers on the Abbey Green, and anything peculiar outside Peckham or Plaistow might have been the latest exhibit from the Zoo.

" Coo -- look at his hairy legs ! "

Wynter was absorbed in gazing at a delightful Queen Anne house, and was conscious neither of hairy legs nor comic comments. And, after all, most female legs when rust-tinged were not things of beauty, but apt to be mottled and spotty, and sometimes purple patched. The old house might have blushed softly, for it was of that colour, with a stone pediment and parapet, and spacious small paned windows, and it had a lovely doorway that blushed for nobody. The white door carried a brass plate -- Mr. Augustus Roper, Commissioner for Oaths, Agent for the Abbey Estate.

H'm, the local lawyer. Augustus ? The name fitted the house, and even while Wynter loitered, a very handsome old gentleman with a Roman face under an almost jaunty Panama hat, emerged from the classic doorway, and gave the man in shorts an appraising stare.

Wynter could never explain the impulse that moved. The words seemed to

come from some other self.

“ Excuse me, sir, but is that your house ? ”

The old gentleman's face crinkled in a smile.

“ It is.”

“ And very lovely. Queen Anne, I think ? ”

“ Yes, to be exact, seventeen hundred and three. And Queen Anne is dead, sir.”

Wynter was not familiar with the old quip, and Mr. Augustus Roper appeared to be somewhat in a hurry, and his brisk puckishness put Wynter back into his habit of shy aloofness

“ Thank you, sir. I must not waste your time.”

Mr. Roper strode off, but when he had taken six strides he faced about and saw the young man still looking at the house. It happened to be the old lawyer's particular pride and love, and the shimmer on that sensitive face attracted him.

“ By the way, are you interested in old houses ? ”

Wynter turned a quick head.

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Staying here ? ”

“ At the ‘ George ’ .”

“ Come in some time and I'll show you round.”

“ I will, sir, and thank you.”

Mr. Roper marched off, arms swinging, to keep an appointment with Sir Igantius Norman, and Wynter went on with his wanderings in a little world that retained some of its tranquillity in spite of motor-cars. These Sussex houses were like old people with friendly faces, and familiar is being friendly. Here was the doctor's house, compact and red and Georgian,

with a little garden behind green railings planted on a wall. The brass plate named him -- Dr. Lovell. Across the way Mr. Drill displayed in old bow windows ironmongery of infinite variety, as became a country shop, spades, forks, scythe blades, sickles, power blowers, shears, balls of twine, dibbles, and what not. Tools for the hands of men, country men whose hands were cunning. The local garage struck a more modern note, and a lad was slinging a petrol hose across the path to give the modern drink to a large black saloon. Mr. Gasson's grocery shop displayed pyramids of tins, tinned this, tinned that. Yes, life was tinned for the millions. And in contemplating these colourful exhibits, Wynter's thoughts went back suddenly to the old orchard. Had a tinned economy moved an old man to hang himself like dead fruit upon an unwanted tree ?

The Abbey of Holy Thurn was not open to visitors on this particular day, and Wynter's tour of Harrowfield chose the church as its finale. There were two monumental yews in the churchyard from which -- so report had it -- bows had been cut for the Field of Agincourt. Wynter wandered about looking at gravestones and reading some of the almost illegible inscriptions. Moss and lichen and the weather had effaced much of the masons' work. The family tomb of the Normans stood on the south of the chancel, with high rails protecting it, and a padlock on its gate, and to Wynter that padlock appeared a superfluous and ironical excrescence. Did you have to lock up the dead for fear of the living ?

The church itself was somewhat squat and solid, and of mixed periods, and Wynter found it gloomy and depressing. There was some crude new glass in the chancel window, and the pews had been renewed in yellowfish and polished pine. The usual memorial tablets were attached to the walls, and one brass plate recorded the names of the Harrowfield men who had been

killed in the Great War, and Wynter stood to read them. He came to one -- Stephen Carter, and read no further, for the coincidence captured his consciousness. That would be the son of poor John Carter who hanged himself. Even in this House of God, those shaggy old trees manifested like ghosts and beckoned to him with mesmeric hands.

II

Sir Ignatius Norman was more than a character, in that he transcended Harrowfield's normality, and went unexplained by local psychology. When seen in public, which was not often, he walked, looking at the ground, like a man absorbed in profound thought. He saw no one, and gave the impression that he did not wish to see them, which may have been so, for ulterior motives were only too prevalent. A black, lean, saturnine creature, with dark and disillusioned eyes, he had the reputation of being both a misanthrope and a philanderer. He possessed a wife and no children, and his wife was like an amiable, raw-boned mare, displaying to all and sundry a set of prominent yellow teeth.

Mr. Augustine Roper, entered the abbey hall, which had been the Abbots' parlour, a notable room, pillared and vaulted with the vaulting painted blue and speckled with silver stars, sat down and nursed his hat and a Roman philosophy. Sir Ignatius could be a difficult man on most occasions, a creature of wilful whimsies, and being not too affluent, careful as to cash. The estate was mortgaged, an encumbrance that Sir Ignatius resented. He was proposing to fell timber, and sell one or two of the outlying farms.

A manservant appeared, old and dry and dusty.

“ Sir Igantius is in the gun-room, sir.”

Mr. Roper rose with the briskness of a boy, and leaving his hat on a chair, followed the man to the gun-room.

Harrowfield said of the baronet that he never looked up in the air, save when he had a gun in his hands and pheasant or partridge to shoot, but that he was the best shot in that part of Sussex. Sir Igantius had a veritable armoury ; and he collected old duelling pistols, and when Mr. Roper entered, he was polishing his favourite gun. He did not look at the lawyer, but acknowledged his presence by a laconic invitation to him to be seated, and Mr. Roper, knowing his man, sat down and waited.

“ Any estimate yet about that timber in High Wood ? ”

“ No, sir. They are measuring up.”

Sir Igantius squinted down the barrels of the gun and was satisfied with their polished gleam.

“ About old Carter’s orchard. I was passing there yesterday. Better turn those old trees into firewood.”

Mr. Roper rubbed his chin.

“ Isn’t that rather -- drastic, sir ? ”

“ The place is derelict. Who wants apples in these days ? I’d sell, if some fool would buy it.”

“ Why not wait for a while, sir. I nearly persuaded Marsden to take it. He said it would cost too much to recover the trees, and re-plant where necessary, but he might change his mind.”

“ Well, put it to him again. Now, about that right-of-way at Brent’s Farm which they are fussing about. Tell ‘em to go to hell.”

“ They have a pretty good case, sir.”

“ Never mind. I’ll fight it.”

Evidently Sir Ignatius was in one of his combative moods, and Mr. Roper did not press the point, for pressure, applied at the wrong moment was energy misdirected. Sir Ignatius had taken another gun from the cabinet, and was examining it, and the old lawyer, observing him, remembered that there was a streak of cruelty in this saturnine man's make-up. He enjoyed killing things, perhaps because it gave him a feeling of power when certain frustrations irked him. Maybe he possessed the old baronial temper and would have thrown recalcitrant tenants and stubborn serfs into the baronial dungeon, or hanged them on the manor gibbet. And was Sir Ignatius conscious of personal failure, for in a public sense he was a failure, feared and avoided. He had married the wrong woman, and she had borne him no children, and the heir to the estate was a somewhat bumptious and cynical young soldier.

"About Carter's orchard, sir. I would like to reprieve it -- if ----"

Sir Ignatius snapped the gun to. An utterly trivial incident had put him in a black mood. He had been fooled by a little beast of a rabbit which was making a distinctive nuisance of itself in the vegetable garden. Sir Ignatius had been presented with a sitter, and had missed it.

"Oh, very well, Roper. Try and find some fool who might think those old wrecks interesting."

Mr. Roper licked his lips, hesitated and chose silence.

III

Wynter's pack contained a somewhat crumpled pair of grey flannel trousers and a brown sports jacket, and before dinner he changed into these garments, for there was a certain decorousness about "The George" which

might frown upon hairy legs in the dining-room. It was Miss Millicent's evening on duty, and she gave to the potential portrait-painter soft, dark-eyed service, and Wynter noticed how clean her hands were, but was somewhat shy of her pretty face. One of the strange phases which had remained with him after his illness was a vague fear of the other sex, and a curious and starved sexlessness in his own make-up.

Millicent had removed his soup plate and persuaded him to try the "George's" roast lamb, when a voice made itself heard outside the dining-room door; voluminous and throaty, and arrogant, and it was addressing Mr. James Merry with that note of genial condescension which certain ladies adopt towards those who are not quite gentlemen.

"Thank you, Mr. Merry. I knew I could count upon the 'George' in an emergency. Really, one wonders what the world is coming to."

Mr. James Merry, and most of Harrowfield were familiar with these emergencies, domestic upheavals which denied to "Mon Repos" its aggressive tranquillity. Cooks departed suddenly after two or three weeks contact with Miss Catharine Garbutt, but not before gossip got abroad, and Harrowfield looked with hostility at "Mon Repos'" sallow face. It was somewhat the face of its mistress, large, looming, and cruel.

Miss Garbutt entered the dining-room, and turned her spectacles and her condescension upon the youngest Miss Merry.

"Good evening, Millie. Shall I take this table?"

Miss Millicent did not smile upon the lady.

"I'm afraid that's reserved. The only one we have left is that one by the door."

Wynter was observing the lady, for he thought he recognised her as the woman at the window who had called to the small girl at the gate. Miss

Garbutt belonged to a type which repelled him. She stood with her tummy pushed out, her chest hollowed, her large head lolling forward over a double chin. Her black hair, cut short, was plastered into a kind of greasy skull-cap, and yet, in spite of her sloppy physique she oozed arrogance, and a suggestion of complacent rectitude. She was the kind of woman who would be active and bossy upon committees, very sure of herself and her opinions, always believing herself to be right, and waddling over opposition like a large black sow.

Miss Garbutt was not liking her table.

"My dear girl, I abhor draughts."

Miss Millicent was curt with her.

"Sorry. I'm afraid there is nothing else."

And Wynter gathered that the youngest Miss Merry was not at all sorry. Nor was he.

Mr. Jack Burton, Harrowfield's veterinary surgeon, also came into dine at "The George", and sighting Miss Garbutt, caught Millicent's eye and grimaced at her. Mr. Burton and Miss Garbutt were not on speaking terms so far as the vet was concerned, for he and Miss Kate Garbutt had different violently on more than one occasion. Miss Garbutt was a very active member of a particular society, and Burton had found her a sanguinary nuisance, in that she had more than once attempted to hustle him into admitting that somebody's dog or cat was being maltreated. Mr. Burton was a hot-tempered little man, and given to high-coloured candour. The damned old woman pretended to be sorry for animals, and persecuted the wretched little niece who lived with her.

William Wynter, conscious of being focussed by those formidable goggles, and somehow resenting their scrutiny, did a thing that caused some of

those who observed the act to chuckle, especially so Mr. Burton. Wynter got up, and changed his chair to the other side of the table, so that his back was to the lady. A hypersensitive and rather eccentric creature -- obviously ! Millicent Merry, very much aware of the changed position, commented on it breezily to Joan on her next visit to the kitchen.

“ What do you think ? ” and she let out a pretty giggle.

“ Think -- what ? ”

“ That new lad changed his chair round after taking a look-see at the Garbutt.”

“ Well, I don't wonder -- Good for him. Bold fellow ! ”

“ Not so bold, my dear.”

“ Sensitive stomach, what ? ”

“ I rather like that lad.”

Indeed, “ The George ” found William Wynter so likeable that later it invited him into what was called “ The Cubby-hole ”, a retreat reserved for the favoured few. Mr. Merry pressed him to a glass of port. That rude gesture of Wynter's had piqued the ladies. Miss Joan, the tease, rallied him upon the deed.

“ Yes, I heard about that. Very naughty of you, sir.”

Wynter looked shy.

“ Er -- I'm afraid I was rude. Who is the lady ? ”

“ Name of Garbutt. Holy terror.”

“ Lives at Mon Repos ? ”

“ Not much repos.”

“ Hasn't she a girl with her ? ”

“ Yes, poor little wretch.”

IV

In a corner of the " Mon Repos " garden stood a little red brick building over which ivy had scrambled until the sentry-box looked like Jack in the Green. It covered the roof, and hung like a curtain over the rickety door. The place had been the house's privy in those more primitive days before a piped water-supply and plumbing had made such crudities things of the past.

The place retained its seat and lid over a pit that had ceased to be cleared twice yearly, and upon this seat sat Rachel Waters, her hands clasped, and her face white as paper. She had displeased her aunt, which was not difficult, and for punishment and proper chastening Miss Garbutt had locked the child in here, taken the key, and marched off to dine at the " The George." The nearest cottage was a hundred yards away, and idle tears or terrified protests would not be heard under this smother of ivy.

Rachel had wept, angrily then hopelessly, and now she sat there in a mute dry face, a face that was as quiet as the garden. She could see a ray of light through her key-hole, and under the lower edge of the old door. Her dark eyes were set in a questioning stare. Why was she not as other girls, or happy and noisy like other girls ? Why was Aunt Kate always assuring her that she was not like other children ? Was it true ? When her mother had been alive she had been like other children, and laughed and romped and gone to bed without fear. Now, fear was with her always, fear of Aunt Kate, fear of Eliza Bunkum, her aunt's maid, fear of darkness, fear of being alone, fear of not being alone. She had become afraid of other children, for, with her sad, serious, sensitive little face she was not like other children, and her unlikeness appeared to provoke them. On more than one

occasion she had fled from them in terror. Why had Aunt Kate had her hair cut short ? She could remember her mother's lovely, tumultuous hair. Why had she no pretty frocks ? Why was her birthday made a day of gloom ? Why -- everything ? Why Aunt Kate's looming severity, and her way of treating her like a creature who was not as other children ? Why was she not sent to school, but was shut up daily in a little room with those dreary school books ? Aunt Kate was her school mistress. Why had the doctor been brought to see her, a kind man who had asked her queer questions, while her aunt had listened with an air of forbidding pity ? Life was becoming a terrifying enigma to Rachel Waters.

Why, above all things, had Aunt Kate shut her up in this noisome little place, because she had stood at the garden gate watching motor-cars pass ? Was it sinful to stand at a gate ? What was sin ? Doing anything that you wished to do, things that her aunt disapproved of ? Bewilderment sat with her on that worm-eaten seat, alone with herself and her terrors. There were those night terrors, dreams, when she would wake up shaking, and her heart going at a gallop.

Rachel sat and waited for the sound of footsteps. It was growing dark, and she heard a cat meowing somewhere. Yes, and why had Aunt Kate sent away her kitten ? Her little face seemed to go whiter in the gloom. She was a pretty child, with a soft and mobile mouth, poignant and liquid eyes, and a forehead that should have been serene under her black hair. In repose and when not frightened she had a young dignity of her own which did not break into the spasmodic restlessness of coarser and more boisterous children.

Then, she heard those footsteps, deliberate and flatfooted, and she shrank into a corner. A key was pushed into the rusty lock. The door

opened. Her aunt loomed there.

“ You can come out, now. I hope you are sorry for your disobedience.”

“ Yes, Aunt Kate -- I didn't mean -- Can I have some supper ? I'm hungry.”

“ No. You will go to bed at once.”

Rachel stood up, and with hands clutching the front of her frock, stepped out into the Spring dusk. It seemed darker to her than usual, and her aunt's ponderous bulk loomed over her. And suddenly she lifted a small moonlike face to Kate Garbutt ; her eyelashes flickered ; she felt desolate and hungry.

“ Won't you kiss me goodnight, Aunt Kate ? ”

Miss Garbutt closed the privy door and locked it. Her large face was expressionless.

“ Did I hear you say you were sorry ? ”

“ But I did nothing, Auntie, to make me feel sorry.”

“ Exactly so, young woman. You have no sense of right and wrong. I have to make allowances for your not being normal.”

- 4 -

Wynter, with no pack upon his shoulders, climbed the hill, and turning to look back, saw Harrowfield like some Italian picture under a cloudless sky. How mysterious was the morning, serene and sparkling, utterly unblemished, adequate and without fear. Man and Nature can share their moods, and they were to share more than the mood of the morning. For Wynter saw a man's coat folded over the orchard gate, and the owner of the coat digging a post-hole two yards from the gate. The notice-board and its post lay waiting to be planted.

This Property for Sale.

Apply at the Abbey Estate Office, Thornfield

The man who was digging the post-hole was a cheerful, red-haired fellow, Sussex but Sussex after the first World War, and somewhat a man of the world who had seen strange lands. When William Wynter came to lean upon the gate, he wished the gentleman good morning without conceding the sir. That title was to be granted to those who had earned it.

"Your notice says up for sale."

The man nodded and observed the stranger. He did not look like the purchaser of a derelict orchard and cottage.

"Old trees last chance -- I gather."

"Oh. You mean ---- ?"

"They do say that they will be turned into firewood. Apple logs smell sweet."

Wynter gazed at the trees. It may have been his fancy, but they looked

greener than yesterday and their flower buds caught the gleam of sunlight.

“ Seems rather a pity. They are fine old trees.”

“ They would be with some work on ‘em. I don’t hold with cutting down the trees.”

“ Anyone likely to buy ? ”

The man spooned some more soil out of the hole.

“ Not much chance for ‘em, I reckon. And I’ve known ‘em since I was that high.”

He paused to hold his spade waist high, and then, since the hole was deep enough, stuck his spade into the turf, and bent to pick up the post and board. He had no rammer with him, and slipping the post into the hole, he proceeded to push the soil back with a foot.

“ Can I hold it for you ? ”

“ Yes, it would be a bit of a help.”

Wynter climbed the gate, and steadied the post in the hole, while the man spaded the soil back, using the handle of the spade as a rammer. Their heads were close together, the red and the black, and suddenly the man gave Wynter a human grin.

“ Staying round here ? ”

“ Yes, at Harrowfield. The ‘ George ’.”

“ Holiday -- I guess.”

Wynter was watching the soil being firmed round the white post.

“ Yes, in a way. I don’t like cities and crowds.”

The man gave him an appraising and friendly stare.

“ Nor me. Them town blokes get the fidgets. Fidgety sort of world these days. Some fellows can’t stay put.”

“ Like this post, or the old trees.”

"You've said it."

"There is something to be said for staying put."

The man spaded in the last of the soil.

"I reckon there is. Means you're feeling a bit chummy with yourself."

Wynter smiled. There was strange wisdom in this country man's philosophy.

When the job was done and he had put on his coat and shouldered his spade, he lit a fag and loitered for a moment.

"Well, that's that. Maybe some bloke will save the old trees. Not a bad spot to doss down in, if a chap had a little money in the bank."

Wynter was looking at the lyre shaped tree with its shred of rotting rope. Did fear still haunt this place? Did old Carter's ghost drift down the dark aisles at midnight?

"Well, good morning, sir."

Wynter turned and smiled at him.

"And good morning, sir, to you."

The man grinned.

"That be the first time any chap has called me sir."

"Well, aren't we all men together?"

Wynter could never decide just when the fantastic decision was made. In fact he was saying to himself "Quite impossible. I'm just playing with the idea. I might go off my head -- living alone here. And what do I know about apples?" Yet, he wandered up and down the orchard, and in and out of the cottage, and had another look down the well, and ended by sitting on the seat in the funny little porch. He found that he had a glimpse through the trees of the grey and russet of Harrowfield. The picture was seen through a frame of green, or two swags joined together to and form an oval

wreath. He lit a pipe and sat smoking, and could supposed that old John Carter must have sat here on summer evenings, smoking a clay, and looking out upon the Sussex scene. How mysterious and satisfying was nature. She caught no buses and no trains, had not to rush to a pub before it closed, did not listen to gabble on the wireless. She had a rhythm and sounds of her own, bird songs, the patter of rain, wind in the trees. Some trick of habit made Wynter glance at his wrist-watch, only to realise that man had made himself the slave and the fool of Time. What would a world be without clocks, and the sun your time-piece, and dawn and sunset measuring your work day ?

He got up ; he strolled towards the gate and the notice-board, and then he did a fantastic thing. He got his arms round the post, waggled it to and fro, and found that it came easily from the soil. For a moment he stood holding it like Christ supporting the Cross, and then he laid it gently face downwards under the tree upon which an old man had hanged himself.

II

One of Mr. Roper's junior clerks opened the door of the lawyer's private room.

" A gentleman waiting to see you, sir. He says he is sorry that he hasn't a card. The name is Wynter."

" Wynter ? -- know him by sight, Smith ? "

" No, sir, a stranger. Says he is staying at the ' George ', that he would like to see you on business."

" Oh, well, show him in, Smith."

Mr. Augustus Roper turned his swivel desk-chair so as to face the door,

for he had a liking for summing up strangers in that second or so before they had prepared their faces for an occasion, but when he saw the young man who had so admired his house, his legal caution allowed itself to relax.

“ Come in, Mr. Wynter. Is the visit professional or architectural ? ”

Wynter gave a glance round the room with its old bookcases full of legal solemnity, its black deed-boxes, and a portrait in oils of a Georgian worthy, which hung over the mantelpiece. The live portrait in the desk chair was more alive and arrestive, white of head, fresh coloured, acutely Roman.

“ It might be both, sir.”

“ Sit down. Well, what can I do for you ? ”

Wynter felt at ease in this spacious and sober room, with its window looking out upon a garden.

“ There is an old orchard for sale, sir, and a cottage.”

“ Oh, Carter’s orchard.”

“ Yes. Could you give me details ? ”

Mr. Roper sat for a moment or two with his hands together and his shrewd eyes on the other man’s face. Had Sir Ignatius’ fool come to life ?

“ Just a moment, Mr. Wynter. Do you know anything about the property ? ”

“ Yes. The previous owner hanged himself.”

Mr. Roper nodded.

“ Poor old John Carter. Am I to understand that you contemplate purchasing ? ”

“ Yes, if the price is not too high.”

“ I see. The land runs to about twelve scores. Then, the cottage, in very bad repair.”

"Yes."

"And the trees very old, and some of them dead. Well, I shall have to consult Sir Igantius Norman, but I think I might quote a figure. Say -- six hundred pounds."

Wynter appeared to reflect for a moment, as though working out sums in his head.

"I would buy at that figure, sir."

"You would?"

"Yes, I could manage it."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mr. Roper swung his chair to face the desk, and picked up a pencil.

"May I have your full name and address, Mr. Wynter."

Wynter gave his name, but no address, for he had been living for the last two months in Bloomsbury lodgings, but he gave the address of his bank. Mr. Roper, jotting down these details, had passed from the legal to the paternal. Did this likeable but seemingly eccentric young man fully appreciate the position, isolation, loneliness, the primitive conditions he would have to suffer.

"One moment, Mr. Wynter. Have you ever lived in the country?"

"No, sir, only when tramping."

"I see. Well, that place is somewhat primitive. Not London, you know. Long dark winter nights. A mile and a half to a cinema or shops."

Wynter smiled. Mr. Roper was a bad salesman but a human being.

"I have been -- crocked, sir. What they used to call shell-shock. Yes, you may think it mad, but I was with the International Brigade in Spain."

Mr. Roper swung his chair round. So, William Wynter was that sort of idealist. Mr. Roper had been all for Franco, but he could sympathise with

inspired youth.

“ I see. Well -- do you think ---- ? ”

“ My doctor said get out into the country and use your hands. Not too much thinking. I have more than a feeling that he was right.”

“ Simple things, Mr. Wynter.”

“ Yes, things without fear in them.”

The old lawyer turned again to his desk. He had lost an only son in the first world war.

“ Somewhat of an experiment, my lad. Would you care to rent the place and see how things work ? ”

“ You are being very kind to me, sir.”

“ Oh, -- no.”

“ I think I would prefer to buy. There may be a lot of peaceful fun in trying to be a friend to those old trees.”

Mr. Roper sat very still, looking out of the window.

“ I think I understand. You can always come and talk things over with me. By the way, don't think me impertinent, but are you married ? ”

“ No, sir. The girl I might have married did not like my going to Spain. Besides, you see, with my -- shall we call it -- temperament -- marriage might not be a happy one for either of us.”

“ That might depend on the woman, Mr. Wynter.”

“ Quite so, sir, but I can't quite picture any modern girl consenting to live in a place like that cottage.”

“ Yet you don't fear -- the life ? ”

Mr. Roper saw the muscles about Wynter's mouth twitch, and his eyes go hard under a frowning forehead.

“ Fear -- has been my -- worst symptom, unceasing fear. I have got to

fight it, overcome it. Forgive me talking about myself -- but if one has a wound in one's consciousness -- a kind of celibate -- hermit life may help to heal it."

Mr. Roper wondered, but returned to the actual business.

"So you really wish me to put this offer up to Sir Ignatius?"

"I do, sir. I would like to look on it as a kind of experiment in the art of living. That may sound a little priggish, but I'm not a prig really."

"I'm sure you're not." Said Mr. Roper, "I shall be seeing Sir Igantius this afternoon, and I can let you know this evening. By the way, why not come in and have some dinner with me?"

"It is very kind of you, sir. I'd love to."

"Good. I, too, am alone, Wynter. And having to learn to be alone -- after having had a good comrade and lost her."

"I think I can understand that, sir."

Wynter rose from his chair, and then remembered that he had a confession to make.

"Oh, by the way, sir, I owe the estate an apology. That new notice board. I -- er -- pulled it up -- temporarily. Of course I will put it back if Sir Igantius Norman refuses my offer."

Mr. Roper allowed himself a half audible chuckle.

"That's all right, Wynter. Eliminating competition, what?"

"Well, I had a strange feeling, sir, that I and that old place were -- somehow -- meant for each other."

"I see. Well, I will expect you about seven. A glass of sherry before we dine."

Yet, when William Wynter had left him, Mr. Roper did not feel completely happy about the business. A likeable lad -- this, but hypersensitive and

subject to impetuous impulses. Was this the right choice for a wild idealist who had gone to fight in Spain, and had been mauled mentally, and still confessed to being not quite as other men? Might not the experiment in living and working alone end in more dead and tragic fruit hanging upon a tree? Yes, Mr. Roper was not wholly happy about it, while realising that youth must face its own fate in its own particular way.

His subsequent interview with Sir Ignatius was brief, and not wholly to Mr. Roper's liking.

"So you have found your fool, Roper, and pretty quickly."

"As a matter of fact, sir, the fool found me. What is the old saying about there being a method in some people's madness."

"Well, take up his bank reference, and if it is satisfactory get on with the job."

"You agree as to the price?"

"Make it six hundred. Who and what is the fellow?"

"A William Wynter. Nice lad. I believe he has been advised to live and work in the country."

"A tubercular crock?"

Mr. Roper's colour deepened. Was it necessary to assume such a mask of curt cynicism, and to suffer a sore and frustrated self to produce vinegar instead of wine?

"No. To be frank, sir, I think five hundred is a fair figure. To make the cottage habitable the purchaser might have to spend that extra hundred."

"It's your business, Roper, to get the best figure you can."

"Yes -- while being fair to the purchaser."

Sir Ignatius shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, very well. One may as well rid oneself of rubbish. Sometimes,

Roper, you bore me with your cult of integrity."

"That is a rather hard saying, sir. If I were in your shoes I should be ashamed of it."

Sir Ignatius Norman did not flare. He laughed one of his rare and jay-like laughs.

"Well, anyhow -- I can accept candour, but not from the fool crowd. That's all, Roper, I think."

The lawyer left him, feeling that he had been wise in not mentioning the Spanish episode, for Sir Ignatius would have regarded the Republicans as red scum, and Franco as a gentlemanly crusader. Mr. Roper himself was a Francoist, but the young might feel otherwise.

At seven o'clock, William Wynter arrived in his sports coat and grey flannel trousers. They drank sherry and dined together, and over a glass of port Mr. Roper toasted the adventure.

"May the old trees be grateful to you, my lad."

Wynter smiled over his raised glass.

"I wonder if nature does respond to kindness?"

"Gardens do, Wynter, and old houses."

"Thank you for the wisdom of understanding."

"Without understanding, my lad, there is no wisdom."

- 5 -

It has been said that some forms of madness are but exaggerations of man's normal behaviour, and that in certain prides and prejudices many of us cannot be considered sane, and William Wynter, going forth to meet his trees by moonlight, was just a little and happily mad. He wanted to get the feel of the old orchard at this silent hour, to sit in the cottage porch and translate himself into the William Wynter who would dwell and labour here, and sleep the sleep of a man without fear. He was in a strangely childish mood, elated and irresponsible. He had been exploring Harrowfield, and had discovered a public path which skirted the churchyard and passed down the hill to meet the main road in the valley. It was a steep, deeply banked path with high thorn hedges, spattered with moonlight and pale with early primroses, and it happened to pass the end of the " Mon Repos " garden where the disused privy stood. A light gate led from the garden into this trackway.

Wynter had reached the ivy-covered building when he heard a sound which brought him to a standstill. A child was weeping somewhere, and weeping uncontrollably, as though all the woe of her little world could never be assuaged. And Wynter was moved and shocked. He could remember weeping like that when -- in his sickness of soul -- he had been sunk in the depths of a poignant despair. There was no break in the sounds of sobbing, and he stood hesitant, moving as man may be to take some wounded creature into his arms and comfort it. And then he saw the gate, and put a hand on the latch, only to find that it was locked with a padlock and chain. The square white house shone in the moonlight, and he recognised it -- " Mon Repos ", the home of that bespectacled school-marm.

“ Mon Repos ”, and a girl weeping her heart out somewhere in the garden. “ Poor little wretch.” The words of Miss Millicent Merry recurred to him.

He could hear her but not see her. Should he use his voice, say “ Is anything the matter ? Can I help ? ” But how obvious, and a strange voice might scare her. And then, while he stood hesitant he heard that other voice.

“ Ra-chel -- Come here.”

The sound of weeping ceased, but there was no answer, and the throaty voice zoomed out again.

“ Ra-chel, did you hear me ? If you are sorry you can have your supper now.”

This time a half sobbing voice answered :

“ I'm not hungry.”

“ Then come in at once and go to bed.”

Wynter waited until he heard a door close, leaving the garden in utter silence. So, the child had gone in, and a door had closed upon fear, for such weeping as he had heard could have come only from hopeless fear. There had been no anger in it, no revolt, but just heart-break and misery, and Wynter, a man who had known the humiliation and the horror of a disoriented self, was moved to curiosity and compassion. Did that white house hold some secret, a tragedy of minor persecution, the impact of tyranny upon too facile tears ? Well, what business was it of his ? That formidable female might be no lover of children.

Yet, the sound of Rachel Water's weeping seemed to go with him down into the valley and up the hill, no audible sound but like unheard and sad music in the moonlight of a mood. “ Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean.” But could any tears be meaningless, or without some response from a

man who had known tears, and who had known fear, and still knew it ?

As he neared the orchard gate he rediscovered old disharmonies in himself. A weeping child, decaying trees ! Would this solitary place, which had seemed so good to him in the sunlight, become macabre and menacing under the moon ? Science had removed ghosts and witches from the world, only to populate it with more rational horrors, the bomb, the shell, gas, power politics, and that evil bird the war-plane. Power had progressed until peace was no more than a gossamer veil, to be rent as the curtain of life's holy of holies had never been rent before.

Wynter came to the gate and leaned upon it. He saw the white board and post lying upon the grass, the lyre-shaped tree, and all those other ancient trees. They were still as stone, and yet not stone, but live things slumbering on this calm spring night. Moonlight and mystery, and suddenly a strange sense of solace descended upon him. No ghosts were here, no catastrophes, no snobberies.

But that there would be other enemies, insect pests, fungi, fruit hungry birds, marauding louts, were realities that did not trouble his consciousness on this Spring night. He was the excited child, innocent and eager, aware only of the glamour of adventure. For, assuredly, it was to be adventure, a Robinson Crusoe world in which he would be cook and carpenter, tiller of the soil. He climbed the gate and wandered up and down the orchard aisles over the rough turf that was drenched with dew. The old trees seemed to lay beneficent hands upon him. They were coming to life -- these trees. He could give them back youth and health and they would return him these blessings. But practical things were not absent. He went and sat in the cottage porch, and confronted problems that were multifarious and pressing. Repairs, furniture, food, tools, and above

all -- knowledge. Even his own ignorance was a provocation. He would have to buy books, read, learn and digest. He was capable of playing cook in an elementary fashion. And then he remembered old Tom Lavender of the limping leg. Would old Tom sponsor him, act as Good Man Friday in more responsible fashion ? Well, why not ? Urgent youth and sober age might combine harmoniously.

And finance ? His parents were dead, and in dying had left him some capital. His needs would be of the simplest. He could grow much of his own food, fruit, and vegetables, and he could keep poultry. What did he know of hens ? Nothing. But his very ignorance was stimulating. How much he had to learn, and in the fascination of learning and of doing he might elude the world's worst affliction -- boredom.

II

Rachel Waters stood looking at two familiar pictures upon the wall above the mantelpiece of her bedroom. She was in a faded old pink nightdress, her feet were tucked into shabby slippers. Aunt Kate had allowed her ten minutes in which to undress and get into bed, and Eliza Bunkum would be sent up the stairs to see that the light was out. How she hated and feared that sour old woman, almost as much as she hated and feared her aunt.

The pictures were portraits of two people. That on the left of the round mirror portrayed a pretty, fragile girl with dark hair, gentle eyes and a weak mouth ; the other was the portrait of a man, handsome, blatant eyed, curly headed, with a smirk that was so confident and insolent. He had a very prominent chin, a sensual mouth, and the moustache of a competent and

cocky sergeant-major. Below the portrait of the woman a steady hand had inscribed in ink the one word " Fool ". The photo of the man was labelled " Scoundrel ".

Her mother and her father.

Rose Waters was dead, after three years in a mental hospital. No one knew whether Samuel Waters was alive or dead. He -- the philanderer and the irresponsible and complacent blackguard had disappeared, and Miss Catharine Garbutt had adopted the daughter.

Night and morning Rachel Waters saw those two portraits and she was still bewildered by them. Why had Aunt Kate added those two contemptuous words ? Fool -- Scoundrel ! Were they like improving texts, scriptural warnings threatening you with damnation unless you conformed to some solemn standard of behaviour ? But Eliza's footsteps were causing the stairs to creak, and Rachel rushed to the light switch and then scrambled into bed like some scared creature taking cover. Eliza could see that there was no slit of light showing under the door, and her big feet shuffled their way downstairs.

Rachel had pulled the clothes over her head, and she lay with her knees drawn up and her arm tense about her body. She could feel her heart beating. Why -- why -- why ? All about her life was a confusing question. Why had Aunt Kate told her in the beginning that her mother had been insane ? What was insanity ? And Aunt Kate had cast over the child the shadow of her mother's tragedy. Her father had deserted her mother. Her father had been a bad man to her mother. Were not such horrors sufficient ? And yet, Aunt Kate had perpetuated them, emphasised them, treated her as though she was the child of her father. Rachel lay there with her limbs contracted, wracked by the eternal why of her little world. And had not

Aunt Kate made her write in her copy book "The Sins of the Fathers shall be visited upon the Children." ? Was that true ? Was that why she had been told that she was not as other children ? She wanted to be like other children.

Bewilderment and tears and a hunger to be loved. She resembled her mother and not her father. Rose Waters had been what the Victorians had described as a sweet woman, affectionate and gentle, with a streak of happy mischief until Samuel had torn all mischief from her. Rachel was an affectionate child, or had been so. She could have been loving even to Catharine Garbutt had that formidable bully wished to be loved, which she did not. And certainly not by her sister's child.

For how could the child know that Kate Garbutt had marked Samuel Waters as her man, and had been full of swarthy and turgid fury when he had chosen her fool of a sister. Had she -- the elder sister married him -- she could have made a man of Samuel, kept him in order, and seen to it that he applied himself to business instead of cultivating drink and petticoats. That was still one of Kate Garbutt's illusions, and contriving to persist in spite of reality, and the unflattering fact that Miss Garbutt was not attractive to men.

And how was a child to know that even her pretty little moon face was an offence to her aunt ? Samuel had had looks, if less so than Rose, and Rachel was promising to outshine her parents. How dared the child of that fool Rose promise to be a beauty, and to repeat those attributes which had turned her aunt into vinegar and rancid fat. Hence the clipped hair, the ugly frocks which suggested an Institution, the eternal assumption that Rachel had a taint and was to be treated as a moron.

Eliza, having assured herself that Rachel's light was out, opened the

library door to report to her mistress. " Mon Repos " emphasised its library, for Miss Garbutt chose to be bookish, and to impress these Sussex bumpkins with her library latitudes. She read psychology and philosophy and sociology, and had views upon the Borstal system and disciplinary schools, and could spout Eugenics, though how much she understood of what she read was questionable.

" The child is in bed, Eliza ? "

Miss Bunkum was a less well educated edition of her mistress, a sour and elderly blonde. She suffered from a slight tremor of the head, but she was by no means senile.

" Yes, the light's out."

Miss Garbutt removed her reading spectacles, and rubbed her myopic eyes.

" The child is growing very difficult, Eliza."

Eliza sniffed.

" I'm thinking that she's getting to the awkward age. A bit precocious -- if you ask me."

Miss Garbutt replaced her spectacles.

" M -- yes. She will need care and watching. A problem period. I think I will ask Dr. Lovell to see her again. He knows her family history."

- 6 -

Miss Millicent Merry was a little disappointed in Mr. William Wynter. He ate his breakfast as though he had a train to catch, head down, a book upon fruit-growing propped against a fern pot, and then dashed off upon the business of his new domestic adventure. He was interviewing the local builders, the local furniture shop which dealt mainly in antiques, the manager of the Harrowfield branch of the Westminster Bank, and Mr. Grubb the principle grocer. He was forever ringing Mr. Roper's bell, and Mr. Roper did not appear to object either to his presence or his enthusiasm. Mr. Augustus Roper was not so old or so remote that he could not respond to youth and its inspirations.

And all about a derelict old orchard and a tumbledown cottage !

"Dash it," said Miss Millicent Merry, "he might be marrying the bally old place."

She spoke more wisely than she knew.

Wynter, having paid his deposit, had asked to be allowed to get to work at once, and Sir Igantius Norman had given his consent. He and Wynter had met in the lawyer's office, and though the contact had been brief, its implications had been negative. An arctic and baffling person -- this Bart. He had given Wynter one comprehensive glance, and never looked at him again.

Sir Igantius had outstayed Wynter, and strolling up and down the room like some restless black leopard, had expressed his opinion with characteristic curtness.

"Very much Wind on the Heath -- Brother."

Mr. Roper had made scratchy noises with a quill pen. Quill pens were a

fad of his.

"A likeable lad."

"I give him two years."

Mr. Roper had gone on scratching. Then why be so frostily cynical in selling a pup to a lad like Wynter?

"Oh -- he may make good, sir. Besides, I think he is persuading old Tom Lavender to coach him."

"I thought the old man was dead."

"No, very much alive."

"Well, I hope the fellow won't hang himself like Carter."

And Mr. Roper had had the feeling that Sir Ignatius would not care a tinker's cuss if this lad ended his adventure at the end of a rope.

II

Mr. Curtis, builder and decorator, looked William Wynter straight in the face. Mr. Curtis had begun life as a working man, and hard work, energy and integrity had made him the master of other and lazier men. In appearance he suggested a Norman farmer, short, stocky, and cheerfully swarthy, with the hands of a craftsman and conscience of the same order. He held a note-book in one hand, and a pencil in the other.

"I am not just making a job, sir, but I'd have all those ceilings down. The laths are rotten and won't carry new plaster."

William Wynter was sensitive about people, and this little man with the straight grey-blue eyes impressed him.

"I'll leave it to you, Mr. Curtis."

"It may cost you a bit more to begin with, but a jerry job would cost you

more in the end."

"What about the thatch?"

"I would have a new thatch, sir."

"Can it be done?"

"I know one old man who can do it, and make an honest job of it."

Wynter smiled at Mr. Curtis.

"Seems to me the country has a conscience."

Mr. Curtis smiled back.

"Some of it, specially the old chaps. You see, sir, we're not factory minded. When you've had a real job all your life, it's yours -- and you're a bit proud of it."

So, together, and feeling like friends, they went all over the cottage, and finished with inspecting the well, and the privy.

"New cover and winch, sir. And that seat -- er -- might let you down."

"Into the depths, Mr. Curtis."

"I'd cover in the old pit, sir, and install one of the new sanitary earth closets."

"Good idea. As I said -- I leave it to you. And how long with the job take?"

"About a month, sir, roughly. It happens to be a slack time, and I can put all my men on to it."

"You'll give me an estimate. I'm not a rich man, Mr. Curtis."

"I understand, sir. I don't fake costs."

III

To Wynter this new world was a little world of beauty and mystery, but to

the countrymen with whom he has to move and have his being there was less conscious beauty and much less mystery. Mr. Curtis and Tom Lavender with their " Mornin', Charlie ", " Mornin', Tom " were patriarchs packed with profound wisdom when compared with this new countryman, this Galahad in search of -- what ? The little rustic community, thatchers, carpenters, plasterers, painters, labourers, might discuss the adventure with tolerant patronage, and a liking for the victim. Wynter might be a toff, and a slightly mad toff, a boyish creature with curiously bright eyes and a certain shyness in his manner, but even the cynic among these fellow men had no word of condemnation.

In fact, during the eleven o'clock break, there was high argument, with Tom Lavender in opposition.

" Have you told him, Tom ? "

" Told him what ? "

" Why -- what he's up against."

" I have not."

Tom was a little different from these others, though Peter Prosser, the old thatcher, was somewhat on the side of Tom. Tom was wise as to the malice of men, and that Bert So-and-So would only be known to smile when Harry So-and-So's greens had club-root. Tom Lavendar was more impersonal than these other fellows. He might have been part of the soil, and jealous only for what the soil demanded. He knew how bitter could be the frustrations which nature and God might impose upon man. Tom had religion and he read his Bible, and understood in his simple way the significance of Eden and man's doom to labour.

" Leave him alone," was his retort, " there may be more sense in tryin' and learnin' than a whole faceful o' sneers."

" Sneers ! Who's sneerin ? "

" You be," said Tom in his gentle way, " and sneers don't kill no woodlice."

So, though William Wynter might be no more than a fool-snob to these other men, and somewhat likeable despite his toffishness, Old Tom saw him otherwise. There was the making of a fine comradeship between these two, and old Tom -- strange to say -- did not lust to play the pedant. Gentle is as gentle does. This lad -- in his innocence -- had much to learn and suffer. Let it come gently, and in the way of Nature.

IV

For William Wynter's eyes were bright, and he was feeling house-proud as the work went on. Fresh paint and paper, clean new ceilings, gates mended, a new chain and bucket rattling down the well. Even the privy welcomed him. Old Tom had got his scythe out and was dealing with a world of weeds, nettles, docks, and what-not. Wynter had spent happy moments in the antique shop. Everything should have a mellow flavour. He bought a gate-legged table, a Welsh dresser, Windsor chairs, Spode china, some Bristol glass, a mahogany bureau, colourful rugs. The baker, the grocer, the milkman and the butcher had agreed to deliver their produce to him. Mr. Dill, the ironmonger, had sold him a new kitchen range, and a collection of pots and pans, cutlery and silver. Wynter had some elementary experience as a cook. He would learn. Life seemed to be all learning. Tom Lavender was giving him three days work a week, and advice that was gradual and careful. He could not and did not say -- " Don't 'ee worrit," for worry there would be plenty. Gentlemen who were born like new-born

babies into such an orchard world as this would get their innocent eyes opened soon enough. And what was there to be done about it ? Tom knew many things that should be done but it was late in the year, and Wynter had not the knowledge or the equipment.

Six in the morning, and the oil stove heating a kettle for early tea, and the apple-man out in the orchard to say good-morning to the trees. His trees. He could exult in the great aisles that were growing green. Pink bug was with them, and to Wynter's innocent eyes the blossom promised to be magnificent. Blossom equalled fruit. What a crop there would be, Bramleys, Blenheims, Codlins, and trees whose names had been forgotten. He would have to arrange for marketing the crop. Old Tom could help him there.

He had bought a scythe and was trying to master the art of scything, but he dug the point in too often, and could put an edge on the blade. Nor had he the countryman's sinewy rhythm and tough back. Well, well, it was all great fun. Skill would come to him with scythe and pruners, knife and saw, and old Tom smiled tolerantly.

" You keep goin', sir. Doin' 'll larn yer."

Tom did not speak of the gossip in the pub.

" How's that there snob getting along ? Countin' the crop, is he ? "

And Tom, looking gentle grim would answer that favourite phrase of his.

" He'll do in time. Success don't kill no woodlice."

In fact, William Wynter was like a girl in her first blooming, and smothered in dreams of apple blossom and fruit. Everything was fun, even washing up, or emptying the sanitary bucket into a hole in the orchard. Fear seemed to have faded out of her world ; May was being gentle and without frosts. Tradesmen called punctually, using the path that old Tom

had scythed. Wynter made his own bed and emptied the slops, and whistled over it. His somewhat primitive cooking was causing him no dyspepsia. He was very much " God's in His Heaven, all's well with the world " mood. The sun was beginning to brown him.

Had he been less innocent, and observed certain doings of old Tom, he might have slipped from dream into reality. Tom Lavendar was poking his head close to the trunks of the old trees, scraping the rough bark with a knife, and shaking his head over some of the exhibits he found there. He took pink buds between finger and thumb, twitched them off, and examined their secret souls. H'm, yes, trouble in plenty. The orchard was foul with prospective pests. For years the insect world had been allowed to propagate weevils, caterpillars, American blight, fungi, and canker. And poor lad Wynter was exulting over the blossom and the fruit that should be.

Should he be warned ?

Old Tom scratched his head. Well, let Nature larn him, and implant her lessons gradually. Nothing like experience, and rough reality. Mr. William Wynter would have to roll up his sleeves and fight back. Had he the guts and the fight in him ? That remained to be seen.

- 7 -

The intellectuals may not approve of coincidences, but on the very morning when he was due to sign certain documents in Mr. Roper's office, William Wynter wandered out to salute the little world that would soon be his. Propitious occasion, dew on the grass and sunlight on the trees. And then he got the impression that some subtle change had developed in a night. There was fustiness here ; the blossom which had promised too richly had a shabby look. The particular tree he was inspecting displayed a multitude of capped flowers, brown cowled and desiccated. Strange -- this ! Had there been frost ? It was the conclusion that all amateurs jump to. He possessed no maximum and minimum thermometer, but he could have sworn that there had been no frost. Well, what of it ? Perhaps this sudden shabbiness was normal. Trees with so much flower upon them might not be able to set the whole of it. But he was puzzled, and a little worried. It was not one of Tom's days, and when he had eaten his breakfast, two boiled eggs and bread and butter -- plus squish, he locked up and set out for Harrowfield.

With the business completed, Wynter remembered that he had not arranged for the delivery of a daily paper. Mr. Newman's stationary and paper shop lay just ahead of him, and he had to swing round a lamp-post to give passage to two large and voluble ladies. Their bulk had hidden a particular figure from him, that of a girl with a pretty, pale, moon-shaped face, black hair cut close, and large and frightened eyes. The girl from " Mon Repos ", the girl whom he had heard weeping in the dusk of a garden. They arrived simultaneously at the door of Mr. Newman's shop, for the paper-boy, irresponsible little wretch, had forgotten Miss Garbutt's "

Times " and " Daily Sketch ", and Rachel had been sent for them. So, Wynter and a hesitant girl confronted each other, and Wynter smiled, but the girl did not, and to Wynter there was provocation in her pale solemnity.

" Going in ? "

She nodded.

" Well, ladies first."

She hesitated, her dark eyes looking up at him with a shy and liquid solemnity, and then a faint flicker of smile was transient in eyes and mouth.

" Thank you."

She walked in ahead of him, and Wynter followed, wondering why her pretty head had been clipped so close, and why her old brown frock was so superfluously short. She had slim and pretty legs, and small feet in shabby shoes. Mr. Newman confronted them behind the counter, a goat-faced, greyish man, severe and irritable.

" Yes, Miss ? "

" The boy forgot Miss Garbutt's papers."

Mr. Newman looked still more severe.

" He's new. Times and Sketch. Will you take 'em ? "

She nodded.

Mr. Newman collected copies with irritable, jerky fingers, thrust them at her, and the child turned to go. Wynter, standing there, responded to a wayward impulse.

" Daily Telegraph, please."

" Daily Telegraph. All gone. Daily Mail or Express."

Wynter took the Mail, put down a penny, and followed Rachel Waters out of the shop.

As he overtook her he was aware of her small face in profile, serious and sad. She did not turn her head, and yet he got the impression that she was very conscious of his nearness. Her lashes flickered over eyes that looked straight ahead. Should he speak to her ? He was as shy of her as she seemed to be of him.

“ Boys will be boys. You got the papers all right.”

How very banal ! She did not turn her head.

“ Mine’s the Daily Mail. Do you read the papers ? ”

This time her lips moved, but she still did not look up at him.

“ Sometimes -- when Aunt Kate ---- ”

She seemed to repress the rest of what she might have said.

“ Much better read books.”

“ School books ? ”

“ No, stories. I used to hate school books.”

This time she gave him a momentary glance.

“ I do -- too. But -- my books are all school books.”

Was that so ? No dream allowed. More repression. And did that swarthy Gorgon ---- ? He gave a jerk of the head, a restive toss which was characteristic.

“ Not even fairy stories ? ”

“ But there aren’t any fairies.”

“ I’m not so sure. I sometimes think I see fairies in my orchard.”

This time her glance was not so cursory, but seemed to search his face.

“ Have you an orchard ? ”

“ Yes. The old place up yonder, called Carter’s Orchard. Ever seen it ? ”

“ No.”

“ It’s rather lovely just now. In full flower, or should be.”

They were in sight of " Mon Repos ", and she became silent as though that house glared at her reprovngly. They came to the iron gate, and with a quick movement Wynter opened it for her. For an instant she lifted her face to him and smiled, and her smile somehow made Wynter see her as a woman.

" Thank you."

II

He had not seen a face at an upper window, Eliza Bunkum about to flick a duster out of that same window. She had been watching them like some goggled eyed she-god whose urge was universal and bitter disapproval. A local wit had said that Miss Bunkum should have been a policeman of the smileless and snooping order, not quite normal man who could share the laughter of his fellows, but a bully and a booted spoil-sport, and stuffed with the arrogance of a little authority. Eliza flicked the duster. She had had no fun in her shabby life, and no man had discovered fun in her.

Eliza gave her duster a last flick and bundled down the stairs. Miss Garbutt was in the garden, and Eliza had her chance to waylay the child in the passage leading to the garden door.

" Got the papers, dearie. Them boys ! And who was your friend ? "

Rachel looked frightened, for Eliza was most dangerous when she indulged in the " Dearie " touch.

" I don't know."

" You don't know ! Tch, that's -- not good. You be careful of strange men, dearie."

" Why ? "

" Tch -- you're innocent. Men can be nasty fellahs. I'm telling you for your own good. You don't know what a man can do to young girls."

But for once the child flared.

" Why do you say such horrid things ? "

" Just because they happen, dearie. Some strange fellah comes along and is as sweet as honey, and then he gets a girl in a quiet corner. And mind you, dearie, a girl sometimes gets murdered."

" I don't believe it."

" Oh, don't you, dearie. I'm trying to warn you for your own good."

Rachel, clutching the papers, escaped into the garden pursued by the noisome shadows of an old woman's creating. Was all life cruel and sinister and ugly ? Had that nice man with the gentle voice ---- ?

She found Miss Garbutt searching for early green-fly on her roses. Wasn't it rather strange that Aunt Kate should have a fondness for roses ? Silently she laid the papers on a near-by chair, and fled, but whither could she fly, with the ghost of the world's ugliness pursuing her ? The library, lessons, her school books ? Of course. Her nice man had said that he hated school books. And why had he spoken to her ? Because -- as Eliza hinted ? How horrible people were ! She opened the library door, and going to her own little table in a corner, sat down and gazed wide-eyed out of the window. Her face looked strangely blanched and drawn for a child's, a haunted face. Well, her French grammar waited for her, and then she noticed something on her table, a rather crumpled Sunday newspaper which Eliza Bunkum read on Sundays to gloat over the many unpleasant things recorded in it.

A headline confronted her :

The Chalk Pit Murder.

Man detained for the murder of a girl of ten

She read, fascinated, shocked, shrinking from what she read, but impelled to go on reading. A man had inveigled a girl into an old chalk pit, and then strangled her. Medical evidence. The girl had been outraged. What was outrage? She shivered. And then -- suddenly -- she flung the paper on the floor, put her elbows on the table and her hands over her ears, and fixed her eyes upon the French book.

But she could not escape from the crude horrors of what she had read, and all that Eliza had hinted at. And who had put the paper over her school books? Eliza -- of course, and she must have done it quickly while she was out in the garden. Rachel pressed her hands to her ears and closed her eyes. What did it all mean? For meaning it had, and she herself was becoming conscious of vague, disturbing, elementary things in her nascent self. Her ignorance was abysmal. At fourteen she had not known how children came into the world. Kate Garbutt had closed the doors of all intimate cupboards.

Why had Eliza exhibited that horror to her? Eliza could be spiteful, and yet -- might there not be some good reason for the warning? A girl strangled, but why? With eyes closed, and ears muffled, she groped in a dual darkness and silence, like some child lost in a wood, alone, terrified of she knew not what.

There was a sudden poignant cry in her -- "Oh, to be loved." No one loved her. And why? Was it true that she was not as other girls, that she

was ugly and alien and unloveable ?

She dropped her hands and opened her eyes. There was an old gold framed mirror over the mantelpiece, and she rose and went to it, and looked at her reflection almost as though she feared to look. Was that her face, a face of a girl whom no one could love ? If only her hair was long. Why shouldn't she ask Aunt Kate to let her hair grow ? So absorbed was she that she did not hear the door open. Miss Garbutt stood there, sallowly severe.

" Rachel."

She turned with a catching of the breath.

" Yes, Aunt Kate."

" Come away from that mirror -- at once. Plain children have no cause to look in mirrors. Go back to your lessons."

Rachel was mute. She went slowly back to her table, and then Miss Garbutt saw the paper on the floor.

" What's this ? ", and she snatched it up.

" Someone put it here, Aunt Kate."

" Paugh ! Disgusting. Don't lie to me. You have been reading."

" I didn't want to read it, Aunt Kate. Eliza must have put it here."

" I don't believe it."

Miss Garbutt bounced out to tackle Eliza, and Eliza lied to her.

" Me. Of course I wouldn't dream of showing a girl such wicked stuff. She must have got it out of my kitchen."

III

For a man who had experienced the cruelties and crudities of a war in which Spaniard had fought Spaniard, and no such thing as chivalry had

been known, William Wynter retained a peculiar innocence. He had known fear and squalor and the perfunctory cynicism of a refugee camp, fights for food, fights about women, and yet he was blessed and cursed with a kind of elemental faith in the worth-whileness of life and of people. Call it a sensitive vitality, a flame that would not be put out, an essence that was indestructible. He was attracted by Rachel Waters, as a young girl can attract a man. He, who had known of prisoners drenched with petrol and set alight to run screaming like living torches, could not suspect that two women could spend their sour juices poisoning the soul of a child. So, William Wynter, climbed to the hill to Carter's Orchard and his cottage, smiling inwardly and pleasantly over what might have seemed a trivial human incident.

He thought -- " Why don't they let her hair grow. She'd be a comely little thing if she had soft dark hair to frame that rather appealing little face."

- 8 -

Tom Lavender came to the orchard gate, carrying the little canvas bag which contained his day's rations. He stood there with a hand on the new gate latch, his eyes fixed upon a figure that was visible in one of the orchard aisles. The morning sunlight was on the trees, and Tom saw William Wynter shade his eyes with his hand as he looked at the trees which had their backs to the sun. Or so Tom described it. Yes, the secret was out, or nearly so, the Serpent in the Garden, millions of little serpents, and the Tree of Knowledge heavy with its fruit.

That very morning Tom had said to his wife : " I reckon I shall have to tell he. No more good muckin' about."

So, Tom opened the gate and closed it softly behind him and made towards the patrolling and perturbed Adam over yonder. Wynter did not hear him, for he was staring at a big Bramley which looked as though fire had browned its blossom in a night. And old Tom felt sorry for the lad, for anything below the age of thirty-five was a lad to Tom.

" Morning, sir."

Wynter's head turned with a jerk.

" Hullo, Tom. Something wrong here. Has there been a frost ? "

Tom's eyes looked straight into Wynter's.

" No, sir. That be mostly weevil."

" Weevil."

" Yes, and winter moth. I ought to 'ave warned 'ee, but somehow -- I did think -- as how ---- "

" I know ? "

" No, sir, there be ways of larnin', and maybe a man must larn hisself. He

may larn more in one season -- than in all them books. I said to meself -- I did -- ' He'll have to find out, just as a chap 'as to find about girls and gettin' married and all that.' "

Wynter gave a little self-conscious laugh. So, this old man was wise in many ways, so much wiser than he was.

" Just what is wrong, Tom ? "

" I'll show 'ee."

With first finger and thumb Tom pulled off one of the capped blossoms, and parting the browned petals disclosed to Wynter the nasty yellowish grub. Then he squeezed it and the maggot popped.

" That be the sinner, ssir. All they browned flowers mean weevil grubs and no fruit."

Wynter was looking with a shocked frown at the tree.

" It's a mass of them, and so are the others."

" Feared so, ssir, and that be'n't all. Just you look at them flowers that are open. Some of 'em look a bit funny. You'll find little caterpillars eatin' 'em. Winter Moth -- that be. Tiddly ones as yet, but they'll grow and start on the leaves. See there, they be on the leaves already."

Wynter took a flowered spur and examined it, and old Tom watched him. How was the lad going to take it, like a softee or a man who would fight back ? "

" What's to be done about it, Tom ? "

" Plenty, ssir, if you be ready to spend money, and put yer heart into it."

" Does it mean no fruit this year ? "

" Maybe, not much, ssir."

" I see."

" P'rhaps I should 'ave told 'ee sooner, but there be ways of larnin'.

And -- after all -- ssir, it be a man's job doing a job for them old trees. I says to myself -- I says -- 'Let he larn and tackle it,' and you will."

Wynter smiled thoughtfully at the old man.

"I think I understand, Tom. No easy-osy job -- this, but blood and sweat and labour."

"You've said it, ssir. Nout's to be got off the land without larnin' and labour. These old trees have enemies, and we have to 'elp the old trees to fight 'em. That be nature's way."

Well, and what was there to be done about it? Tom rubbed a hand over the dry and crusty bark of the tree, and there beneath some of the fallen scales could be seen eggs and mature caterpillars and what not. Tom had very definite views upon what should be done. He would scrape the trunks next winter, and give them an old fashioned liming. Well, what if that fellow who talked on the wireless had said that the only virtue of lime-washing tree trunks was that you could see them at night and not go blundering into tem. Oh, yes, very funny, but some of these know-all gents were too damned cock-sure, and them weevils were hard to deal with, little black bug things that shoved a snout into a blossom and laid an egg in it. You could pick 'em by hand, or wrap sacking round the tree and find the little blighters sheltering in it, and burn 'em. Yes, Tom had a weeze of his own. He believed in lighting fires under the trees in the early spring, and burning all rubbish and some of the pests with it. And you could grease-band in the autumn and the spring. Tom had trapped some of the ascending weevils on these bands. As for the caterpillars, winter spray for the eggs, and arsenate of lead when the brutes were eating the flowers and leaves. Yes, and there were masses of dead wood to be cut out in winter, and spurs thinned and any big wound covered with Stockholm tar. Wynter, leaning

against a tree trunk, listened to all this apple lore, and looked at the high and spreading canopies and wondered.

“ Yes, Tom, but how can one spray big trees like these ? ”

“ Ah, there you be, sir. You want one of them power-sprayers. Knapsack’s no good for big trees. There be a machine they use at th’ Abbey. It do plough and hoe and harrow and reap, and you can fix a power-sprayer to it. It may cost a bit, but I don’t see aught else for it.”

Wynter nodded.

“ Spend money to save money, Tom ? ”

“ Sure-ly, ssir. I be for tellin’ ‘ee the truth.”

“ I know you are, Tom.”

II

For a fellow who had been a man of words, Wynter had known Fleet Street and published two unsuccessful novels before the Spanish episode -- he faced up to his new war with nature more courageously than might have been expected. Sobered he might be as he sat in the porch that evening and smoked his pipe and considered the situation and its interferences. No doubt these countrymen had thought him a fool, a fellow who had been sold a pup, and whose career as a fruit-grower would not outlast a season. Had old Roper been wise as to the shabbiness of both the trees and the bargain ? But -- why shabby ? Let mere commercial cheapness be set aside. He, a sick man, had felt the lure of the land, and maybe there was a wisdom in the deeps of you that was both wild and valid. These old trees were sick, and needed the physician, and as he looked at them with the evening light upon their niffed blossoms, he saw them most strangely as friends, stretching

out their hands to him and appealing for help. Could a man grow fond of a collection of old trees, find in them solace and compassion, and defence against loneliness ? They did not mock or sneer, or grin maliciously over your ignorance, or drop bombs when the moon was full, or run away and leave you in the lurch.

Could trees feel fear ? Perhaps. And perhaps only a simpleton and a sensitive who had known fear could see in this poor, pest ridden orchard labour that might be symbolical. He could recall wrecked trees in Spain, trees hacked down -- the victims of man's evil spite and hate. Had man become a hopeless barbarian, a savage strutting lout, interested only in blood and violence ? Was man past helping ? Wynter sat there with his elbows on his knees, pulling hard at his pipe, his face almost the face of a young fanatic. His challenge was here, and he would accept it. His labour should be to put fear and disease from this green world, or attempt it. Hands not words, doing instead of gabbling. No, no mere sentimental job -- this, but tough labour, courage and patience, and the passion to endure.

Then he remembered something, and went into the cottage, and in the newly painted cupboard lay old Carter's bible. He had replaced it there -- for luck, if luck there could be in so tragic a book. He stood by the window with its new rose coloured curtains, and re-read those pathetic entries, the sorrow and despair of an old weary man. They should have scared him, but they did not. He sat down and read a part of Genesis, and the stately and simple prose seemed to strengthen and tranquilise him. Here, man had faith in some Otherness and in himself. Life was not just jazz and little drinks, and hopping in and out of bed with easy-osy wenches. There was a touch of grimness and profound austerity in the inspired challenge of this old book. Go to it and labour, serve your seven

years for Rachel, sweat, pray and endure. Gently he closed the book, put it back into the cupboard and went out to walk in the orchard.

Was God too walking amid these trees ?

III

Mr. Dill's shop in Harrowfield High Street was one of those emporiums dear to a countryman. It could sell you anything from a screw to a reaping machine. You might find an old labourer standing there getting the feel of a billhook or a sickle, the balance and cunning of a tool, and perhaps damning it as the product of a fellow who had never cut faggots or swopped grass.

Mr. Dill had three assistants known as Tom, Dick, and Harry, who had been with him for many years and were as wise as to customers as the wares they sold. Mr. Dill would not allow rubbish in his shop, and not the most plausible of travellers could impose improved gadgets upon him, and Mr. Dill was shy of new firms, and especially those which advertised too lavishly. During business hours he spent most of the day in a glass box at the top of some steps leading from the main shop, rather like some grey, shrewd bird perched and watching in sage silence. He kept his own books and dealt with all the correspondence, but when some more notable customers appeared he would stalk down on his long thin legs and stand like a secretary bird, his arms close to his sides, like wings.

Tom, the senior assistant, was Wynter's choice. Tom was more spectacles that glimmered on a genial, helpful face. Hands on counter, body sloped forward, he was the perfect salesman.

"What can I do for you, sir ?"

Dick and Harry, who were unoccupied for the moment, observed the gentleman and exchanged quick glances. Wynter did not yet know it, but he was news in Harrowfield, a sweet innocent man who had been persuaded into buying a derelict piece of property, and who imagined that he would prosper there. Mr. Dill and his staff had known other such adventurous, credulous gents, who had tried chicken farming or fruit growing and had departed in due course, poorer if not wiser men.

“ Can I see Mr. Dill ? ”

Mr. Dill happened to be watching and listening. He rose from his high stool in the glazed box, and appeared at the head of the steps.

“ Good morning, sir. Can I be of any assistance ? ”

“ I want your advice, Mr. Dill.”

“ It's yours for what it's worth, sir. Would you like to step into my office.”

The office did contain one cane-bottomed chair as well as Mr. Dill's high stool, but so austere and limited was it as to space that when Wynter sat down he was almost up against Mr. Dill's legs. Mr. Dill had a gold chain looped across his waistcoat and Wynter could have counted the buttons, and to look up into Mr. Dill's face entailed much neck bending. Briefly he explained that he was the new owner of Carter's Orchard, and that it was in a very bad state and that he -- Wynter -- had heard of a machine that might be very useful in helping to reclaim it.

Mr. Dill perched himself on his stool. Like most of Harrowfield he knew all about Carter's Orchard, and the rather colourful gentleman who sat at his feet. Poor young man ! But Mr. Wynter had become a good customer who paid cash, and Mr. Dill, for all his air of grey austerity, was a kind-hearted man.

" Yes, sir, you mean the Moto-Culto."

" Do you know anything about it ? I hear the Abbey has one."

Mr. Dill himself had supplied the machine, after putting the firm that manufactured it through a questionnaire that was almost third degree.

" Yes, sir, it does its work, though not up to a heavy ploughing. I have two more on order. Good for orchard and market-garden jobs."

" Any defects ? "

" Not yet, sir. Besides -- I've insisted upon a pretty stiff guarantee."

" I hear a spraying outfit can be attached."

" That's so, sir. They have used it at the Abbey this spring, and I went and had a look at the work. Quite satisfactory."

" Pretty expensive, I suppose."

Mr. Dill turned to his desk and pulled out a brochure from a particular pigeonhole.

" Here you are, sir. Two types, 2½ and 5 H.P. The rest of the equipment extra. A complete outfit for the more powerful machine would cost you about £150."

Wynter winced inwardly.

" Rather a lot of money."

" Quite so, sir, but the machine would save you a lot in labour. It will do a few hours in what would take a man days."

" Heavy on petrol ? "

" No -- quite economical, sir."

Wynter had opened the brochure, and was glancing through it. How or why he got the impression that this lean, grey man was rather sorry for him -- he could not say, but get it he did, and in the Yankee lingo it was like a kick in the pants.

" I'll buy, Mr. Dill. How long will delivery take ? "

" Oh, about a month, sir, I should say. Shall I book the order ? "

" Yes, for the complete outfit. Would you like a deposit ? "

" Quite unnecessary, sir. Perhaps you would like a demonstration. I can arrange for the firm to give you one."

" Yes, I think I should."

" Then I'll arrange it, sir. And much obliged to you."

Wynter walked out of Mr. Dill's shop, wondering whether he had done a rash and ridiculous thing. One hundred and fifty pounds, and for what ? Well, in for a penny in for a pound. He and Carter's Orchard were in the cart together. And Mr. Dill, sitting down to put in an order to the makers of the Moto-Culto, rubbed his chin, and supposed that in a year or two there might be a second-hand outfit for sale. These nectic amateurs, back to the land innocents. Well, the idea was good, but when a man like old Carter had hanged himself, what hope was there for this weedy lad ?

Wynter, pausing involuntarily outside Mr. Roper's great white door, saw it open and frame in the classic doorway the figure of Augustus. Mr. Roper's ruddy, Roman face crinkled in a smile.

" Hullo, William, how's the world ? "

Almost Wynter said, " Lousy."

But what he did say was -- " I find I have a lot to learn, sir, I suppose that's inevitable."

He was smile-less, and the smile passed from the old lawyer's face.

" Trouble ? "

" Plenty."

" You used the right word, William -- but I can tell you that to my knowledge those trees did their duty, and did it well."

Wynter looked into the old man's face.

" And my duty is ---- ? "

" Yes, you can read it that way. And you'll do it, and you may be wiser than you know."

They parted, and Wynter passed on, pondering those words. So, Mr. Augustus Roper was not one of those who thought him a ramshackle fool. And then, in taking the field path past the back of the " Mon Repos " garden he heard a throaty gargling voice of Miss Garbutt rumbling an eternal admonition.

" Rachel. Who gave you permission to come out here ? Go back -- at once -- to your lessons."

There was no reply from the girl, and Wynter felt that he could have supplied it, and quite vulgarly so.

- 9 -

Eliza Bunkum might go about saying that Miss Rachel was too precocious. There was other and sufficient evidence of maturity. Falsehoods can have peculiar origins, and Miss Catharine Garbutt's concealment of birth certificates and her falsification of her niece's age were -- in a sense -- quite rational. Immaturity postulated the persistence of power, and if Rachel was catalogued as twelve when she was about to be sixteen, authority remained more absolute. Yet, if Miss Garbutt had been more subtle she might have gathered that by advancing her niece's age instead of retarding it she could have made her case more absolute. She could have said -- "Yes, my niece is fifteen. That may surprise you, but her unfortunate heritage explains her backwardness and her almost infantile mentality. I have to treat her as a child. Expert opinion has informed me that she will never develop normally. Yes, a problem case. I am glad to say that I have been able to save her from some Institution for the weak minded."

Miss Garbutt happened to be one of those women who are subject to very wet winter colds when she looked and sounded like a pug-dog with acute catarrh, and there were occasions when she suffered from such colds in the late spring or early summer. A mild bronchitis sometimes complicated the case, and Dr. Lovell would be called in. The doctor, who, behind a mild gravity, concealed a caustic and humorous shrewdness, was very circumspect in his attitude to Miss Garbutt. It so happened that Aunt Kate took her to bed early in June, and Rachel, seizing her chance, broke out by climbing the garden gate. She was long legged and agile and graceful in her movements, and this summer seemed to have roused a new spirit in her.

Eliza had gone out to collect Miss Garbutt's medicine, and escape -- even for an hour -- was a protest and an adventure. Rachel was hatless, and wearing an old frock, and as she skimmed down the field path into the valley she more girl than child. Sex might be more than incipient in her, and full of vague urges and emotional revolt. To be free for an hour, to wander as she pleased, even to pick wild flowers gave her a sense of self-expression.

She reached the road and turned northwards up the hill, and half way up it diverged to gather pink companions from the green growth of hedge bottom. A cock blackbird was singing, and the hedgerows were full of bird life. Holding her posy against her bosom like a gleaner's sheaf, she came to a gate, and rows upon rows of old apple trees. A sharp, metallic clank-clank came from somewhere. She turned to the gate and saw a man bending over a black and red machine. He appeared to be turning a handle and without result, and as she watched she saw him straighten, throw the handle into the grass, and toss back his hair.

"Blast you !"

It was the man of the newspaper shop, and her hands pressed the flowers against her bosom. She saw him recover the handle, fit it, put his left hand to something on the top of the machine, and heave. Clank-clank, but there was no response from the engine. Its continency seemed to rouse him to fury. He kept turning the handle without result, and then -- as though exhausted -- he straightened, faced about with an air of breathlessness, began to stride up and down, and then he saw her, and stood still.

For a second or two they stared at each other across the stretch of grass, he -- with a gradual -- self-conscious smile, she with a suddenly remembered horror. Men -- men, were dangerous beasts. Girls could be

strangled.

His lips moved, and he took a step towards the gate.

"Hullo -- I'm afraid I have been using bad language."

The white moon her of face hung there for a moment. He saw the pink flowers in contrast with her pallor. Her eyes were big and black and frightened. But why fear?

He stood still.

"It's all right. Yes, this is the old orchard."

He saw her back away from the gate still looking at him as though he was some creature to be dreaded. Why -- fear, and of him? Had that black besom so bullied her? He was conscious of comprehension.

"Nothing to be afraid of here, my dear. The machine has the sulks. I'll have another go at her."

He faced about and returned to the Moto-Culto, put a hand on the half-compression lever, and gave a pull to the cranking handle. No good. He straightened, scratched his head and then opened the tool box. The plug might be sooted up. Better have a look at it. He got out a spanner, removed the plug, and found it foul. Then, he glanced towards the gate. She had returned to it and was watching him.

He began to talk both to himself and to her, as he removed the cap from the petrol tank and dipped a piece of rag in it. Fear needed combating, fear needed resolving.

"You -- are -- an ass, Bill. The tank is pretty well empty. Yes, I am an ass. This machine is new and I am rather new to it."

He laughed and glanced at her as he scrubbed away at the plug.

"All sooted up. So she wouldn't fire properly. Yes, I am an ass."

He got the impression that she smiled faintly, and that her eyes had lost

their dark stare. A man who could laugh, and at himself, might not inspire fear. But still she was silent.

“ Do you see the old trees ? They look terribly shabby, don't they ? ”

He gave her another quick look, and saw that her eyes had lifted to the trees.

“ Yes. Why ? ”

“ Caterpillars. Eaten to shreds. I am trying to spray some of them, if this bally engine won't play tricks.”

He replaced the plug, tickled the carburettor, and bent to the starting handle. Then he paused, and looked round over a shoulder.

“ Wish me -- luck. What is your name ? ”

“ Rachel.”

“ Say -- start -- you blighter.”

She was solemn, smile-less, watching.

“ Start -- you naughty thing.”

He laughed, gave a heave, and the engine came to life. He withdrew the handle, tossed it up, and caught it.

“ Thank you, Rachel. You are a witch.”

This time she smiled at him, and watched as he opened the throttle and speeded up the engine. The spraying equipment was attached, and Wynter had been moving the machine from tree to tree by its own power, and then using the long lance on the riddled foliage. He let in the clutch and trundled the Moto-Culto to the next tree, worked her into position, uncoiled the length of armoured hose, and set the power pump going. A fine fog enveloped one half of the tree. The job was a two handed one, but it was not one of Tom's days, and Wynter was out for practice and experience.

He turned to glance at her, and saw that she had climbed the gate and was

perched on it, and that she was still holding her bunch of pink companions. Had his attention to business given her confidence ? It had. This potential beast and strangler appeared to be more intent upon his work than upon the possible provocation of raw sex, though she was too innocent as yet to translate Eliza Bunkum's warnings into crude physiology. Moreover the plume of spray fascinated her, and the deft way he handled the long lance and hose, and she understood that he was succouring the poor, ragged old trees. That seemed good to her in a simple and actual way. And she liked the set of his head and the way his hair grew, and his smile, and his brown legs in their brown shorts and the old jerkin he was wearing.

Then he switched off the engine, and in the silence she heard a sound that wrenched her back to stark reality, the distant chiming of Harrowfield's church clock striking the hour. Her face seemed to close up and grow shadowy. How long had she been away from " Mon Repos " ? Too long. She slithered off the gate and fled.

But she did turn and wave a hand to him, and Wynter stood watching, the lance still in his hand.

A pretty, sensitive kid, too sensitive to be at the mercy of that swarthy autocrat. What was her history, and what was the meaning of it all ? He strolled to the gate, his hands in the pockets of his shorts, and there he saw one pink companion lying on the grass, a relic from her bunch of wild flowers, and smiling, he picked it up and slipped it into the top buttonhole of his old jerkin.

Then he remembered that his petrol tank was nearly empty, and he walked off towards the cottage for a can, and as he passed along a row of trees he looked up at their shabby, riddled foliage. That was reality -- as the

country man knew it, pests to be fought, the weather humoured failures to be endured. His eyes had more sharpness and less dreaminess than of yore, and in repose his face suggested a sternness, a new will-force, the face of a man who could once more face fire.

“Lose yourself in an apple tree.”

Maybe, he was finding himself in these sick trees.

Miss Garbutt, emerging from a spasm of coughing and sneezing, blew a very wet nose, and accepted the glass of medicine Eliza had poured out for her.

“Where’s the child? At her lessons?”

Eliza re-corked the bottle, giving it a pat with the palm of her hand.

“Out -- somewhere.”

“Out?”

“Yes. Can’t see her anywhere.”

Miss Garbutt swallowed her dose, and blew her nose again with wet vigour.

“Disgraceful. Taking advantage of my being ill. Send her up to me, Eliza, when she comes in.”

“I will, Miss.”

Half an hour later, Rachel, carrying her bunch of flowers and trying to reach the library without meeting Eliza, was surprised and caught by that sweet virgin. She had been waiting -- like a cat for a mouse, and she pounced.

“You’d better go upstairs, young lady, and say where you’ve been.”

There was a smut severity in Eliza’s smirk, and Rachel, who, in spite of persecution, had not been converted to the cult of studied mendacity, faced the inevitable and carried her flowers upstairs. Miss Garbutt,

semi-erect and turgid, asked the fateful question.

“ Where have you been ? ”

“ Picking flowers, Aunt Kate. Would you like them ? ”

“ And neglecting your lessons. Go downstairs at once to your French, and tell Eliza to put those things in the dustbin.”

Rachel obeyed her, but the flowers did not reach that grim receptacle, nor did Miss Garbutt receive the whole of the story. Why should she ? To omit a part of it and the most pregnant part of it, could not be condemned as mendacity.

- 10 -

A part of Harrowfield, having classified William Wynter as a poor ignorant Snob, was prepared to grin over his amateur attempt to cope with Carter's Orchard. Harrowfield, or that part of it which described itself as "The Workers", was very much England in miniature, that strange conglomeration of envy, otiose, good nature, malice, complacency, and a fondness for dogs and children, ascribed all success to luck or unfair opportunity. It possessed some practical skill and a little shallow information, and it would have gaped at Genius. If it boasted of a brain, that organ was as good as anybody else's. The unpleasant word "Snob" was coming into full flower, and to working Harrowfield, Mr. William Wynter was a Snob, if a pleasant and nicely spoken specimen of the Middle Classes. Harrowfield sat back with its mug of beer, and with proper complacency let wind over a Snob's adventure. No Snob was supposed to be capable of hard work. If a Snob became skillful with a spade it was not labour, but a hobby. Did the poor mutt think he could do what John Carter had failed to do? Harrowfield gave him two years, and did not expect to be peeved by the poor fool succeeding. Harrowfield on its Sunday strolls had had a look at the old trees. Yes, and a nice mess they were in, and so would Mr. Wynter be in a season or two. There were some critics who asserted that they were sorry for the fellow, which was just a gesture of patronage, and a pat to your own complacency. That they would cease from expressing sorrow were Mr. Wynter to bring the old orchard back to life, goes without saying. And such is normal man.

Nor was Wynter himself under any illusions. He happened to have overheard casual conversation.

“ Not a decent tree on the place. Lot of old rubbish.”

“ Tee-hee, a fool and his money are soon parted.”

For the trees themselves were leaving William Wynter no illusions. It was that mysterious period when young apples suddenly show themselves in a world that had seemed empty of apples, little green fellows who had played hide and seek with you, but the orchard's ragged foliage had nothing to hide.

“ There won't be an apple, Tom.”

Old Tom had rubbed his chin.

“ Maybe -- there'll be just a few, ssir. It be funny how they show up -- when you just think there be none of 'em.”

“ But just look at the leaves.”

“ You wait a bit. We've given them damned caterpillars their dose of poison.”

They had, working together long hours with the Moto-Culto and its sprayer. The machine was functioning well, and the riddled foliage was grey with arsenate of lead, and Tom could point out the pests that had turned from green to yellow, and were hanging by threads or were stuck dead upon the leaves.

“ You wait a bit, ssir. Them old trees have some spunk in 'em yet.”

Other plans, other work. Grubber and cross-cut saw were at work on trees that were past hope or prone on the grass. Hard labour, and much to learn. Grubbing up old butts was no child's play, but Tom taught Wynter how to tackle it. Dig your pit deep and wide, and get room to work, and don't worry about aching backs. For a month or two Wynter's back went to bed in a state of acute self pity, and then appeared to accept hard labour and to realise that aches and grousing would not solve the situation. Moreover,

how could a man in the early thirties suffer himself to be outpaced by an old fellow in the late sixties ? Tom went his own pace, but his cunnings and his steady rhythm put Wynter to shame.

“ You beat me at it, Tom.”

Tom grinned at him benignly.

“ It be habit, ssir, and bein’ born to it -- so to speak. You be doin’ pretty well, if you ask me.”

For Tom was pleased with his pupil. Wynter was browning and hardening up, and his hands were ceasing to blister, and to Tom’s shrewd eyes this town gentleman was learning the craft. More speed, more results, a steadier rhythm, no pinched, tired face at the end of the day. Let them other chaps sneer. Tom, in his serene old age, was becoming as interested in the man as in the orchard, and interest contained affection. The pupil was emulating the master, and old Tom was prepared to chuckle in the faces of those who prophesied failure.

For other plans were in the air. Those parts of the orchard where dead and dying trees had been cleared were to be cultivated and planted with bush fruits, black currants and gooseberries, fruit that was not too tempting to birds and could be marketed somewhat at leisure. Old Tom might have been seer on a mountain top. This silly old country had been letting its fruit acreage drop by year. And what if that nice gentleman Hitler started another world’s rough-house ?

II

Had William Wynter been asked whether there was any duty in his new world which he did not like, he could have replied with promptness :

“ Yes, washing-up.”

Work out of doors, creative and productive work, could get into your blood, but those damned plates and cups, glasses and dishes, and spoons and cutlery which waited for you in a dirty depressing pile made his gorge rise. They waited upon you with greasy severity, and no sooner were they dealt with than another meal began a fresh accumulation. And could anything be done about it ?

Hire a woman to come in and clean and make your bed and wash-up ? Did women like that sort of work ? It was theirs day in and day out. But Wynter was a little worried about finance. He had spent a lot of money on repairs and equipment. He had Tom to pay three days a week, and his private income did not amount to more than two hundred pounds a year. No, he would have to exert self-discipline, and tackle the crockery and the cooking and the bed-making, even though stomach and head both rebelled.

“ Afraid I’m a bit late this morning, Tom. Had all yesterday’s things to wash up.”

Tom looked coy.

“ Why don’t ‘ee get a woman in, ssir ? ”

“ Can’t afford it, Tom.”

Tom looked still more coy. Well, why did not Mr. Wynter find a wife ? In Tom’s world, wives were destined for such helpfulness. Man out of doors, woman within. But he did not ask that question. Yet Tom was not wholly out of doors, for Mary Lavendar suffered from varicose veins and rheumatism, and there were days when her husband did the washing up, and to his credit without breakages.

“ I might help ‘ee, ssir.”

“ You, Tom ? ”

“ Well, I be’n’t too bad with a dishcloth.”

So, on two days a week Tom did the washing-up, and Wynter blessed him.

But meals, those eternal meals ! Cooking took up a devil of a time, and cold bully beef or sardine’s and grocer’s cake were apt to become forbidding. Nor was a plethora of boiled eggs exciting. Wynter did give Sunday morning to the cooking of a hot dinner, and sometime he made a mess of it, and his small joint had to be relegated to the mincer. Potatoes were prone to greasy stoniness, and pastry like wash-leather. Oh, woman, when we invite indigestion and lack of pique, how blessed are thy hands !

One solution became obvious. He would take his Sunday dinner and supper at “ The George ”. He did so, and the Misses Merry were sympathetic and interested. Harrowfield did not swarm with interesting young men, and maybe Mr. William Wynter had more S.A. than he suspected. Harrowfield gossiped. Which of the three Graces was it to be, Marie, Joan, or Millicent ?

In the days of William’s grandfather, absence from church on the Sabbath had marked a man as without morals or as a follower of that dreadful fellow Thomas Huxley. Twenty five years later, and the social odium had become less acute, and now Harrowfield of the late 1930’s regarded religion rather as a hobby and not a solemn call to worship. Some people seemed to like going to church, others preferred the pub when it was open ; others toured forth in their cars or on their motor-bikes. Many more pottered in their gardens, a few went walking, though legs were going out of fashion, save as exhibits for nudity, hairiness, or silk stockings. Then, of course, there were the Chapels, three of them, and people with somewhat smile-less and non-conforming faces who favoured a little godliness before Sunday dinner. Most of the young did not help to swell

St. Mary's meagre congregation ; in fact the only time they passed its portals was to be married or to have a baby christened. Harrowfield's population was falling. And there were the three Misses Merry, handsome orderly young women, ripe for every thrill that marriage could give. Any of them might instill some sense into that bookish fool who was under the delusion that he could make money out of fruit.

For, somehow, it had got abroad that Mr. William Wynter was an author. Tom Lavender had seen copies of those books on a cottage shelf.

A fellow who wrote books ! To most of Harrowfield that was a peculiarly portentous joke.

III

Miss Catharine Garbutt attended St. Mary's church while Miss Bunkum cooked the Sunday dinner, and Rachel Waters went with her aunt as a sort of social exhibit that had to be displayed on stated occasions. Harrowfield was alive with gossip concerning the significant " Mon Repos ". Miss Garbutt's niece was not quite all there, and was the pathetic product of an erring mother long since dead. There was yet another variant, the girl was Miss Garbutt's own daughter, though the two faces in this romantic picture should have quashed any such absurd rumour.

But Rachel Waters went to church with her swarthy wardress, and was stared at and was conscious of it, and looked at nobody save the vicar. Kind people had asked Rachel to their tea-parties, but Miss Garbutt -- in solemn asides -- had refused such invitations, explaining that her niece was too much of a problem for such public affairs. People wondered. The

girl looked scared and dumb, but she did not pull faces or make animal noises.

Something had happened to Rachel. She knew things which she had not known before. She looked in a mirror and saw her skirts well above her knees, and also she knew and felt that it should not be so. Why would not Aunt Kate see her long -- if pretty -- legs as she saw them, and understand that they should be more clothed? She was even more conscious of being stared at.

So, William Wynter, heading for the "George" and Sunday dinner, met portions of St. Mary's congregation under the high elms. He saw Miss Garbutt and a long legged girl in a brown pleated skirt rising well above her knees, and her black stockings emphasizing her childishness. The confrontation was inevitable, and Wynter smiled and raised his hat. Miss Garbutt gave him a surprised glare, but Rachel -- full of strange secret shames -- looked down at the stones of the paved path.

Wynter passed on, provoked to the inevitable questions. Why did not that woman dress the girl properly? Why had that little flinching face gone past him with such an air of fear and humiliation? The answers to such questions were both obvious to him and beyond him.

But Miss Garbutt was asking questions of her own.

"Who was that young man?"

Rachel was mute, too conscious of the bizarreness of her childish self even to lie.

"Have you met him before?"

"Yes, Aunt Kate."

"And where?"

"In the newspaper shop. He spoke to me."

Miss Garbutt bustled along with flouncing severity.

“ Oh, did he ! Well, understand, Rachel, that you will not speak to strange men.”

More muteness.

“ And don't be sulky. I know what is for your good, my child, and you will obey me.”

The afternoon of Sunday was for Rachel somewhat a period of peace. Miss Garbutt went to sleep in her armchair, and Rachel was sent to her bedroom to learn the collect for the day, but on this Sunday afternoon she busied herself otherwise. She had been taught to sew, and getting out an old frock she cut a strip from the skirt and cobbled it in a flounce to the frock she had been wearing to church. The two colours were in contrast, but that could not be helped, and when the deed was done she looked at her new self in a mirror. Her skirts were well below her knees, and gave her a sudden air of maturity. No longer did those slim legs represent her as an overgrown, gawking child.

The gong rang for tea. It was a large and brazen gong which stood in the hall and might have served an institution or a hotel, and Eliza Bunkum appeared to enjoy thumping it. The sound sent a frenitis of fear through Rachel. Would Aunt Kate notice what she had done to her skirt, and if so would she object ? Yet, why should she ? Miss Garbutt was always preaching industry to Rachel, domestic silence for the weak-minded, and her niece was made to clean the silver, turn out rooms and help Eliza to wash up. So a trepidant Rachel went slowly down the stairs and into the drawing-room where Miss Garbutt sat behind the Benares brass tray, and slipped swiftly into a chair.

But the offence had been discovered, and Miss Garbutt's spectacles looked

at her.

“What have you been doing? Stand up.”

“My skirt was too short, Auntie.”

“Stand up. Come here.”

Rachel may not have foreseen the thing that was to happen to her. Perhaps her aunt wished to examine the work. She went and stood by the table, and Miss Garbutt, putting both hands on the job, tore off the offending flounce.

“How dare you interfere with your clothes without my permission?”

“But they are my clothes.”

“Your clothes -- indeed! I pay for them. Go back to your bedroom.”

Rachel faltered.

“Why are you so unkind to me?”

“Unkind. And where would you be, young woman, if I had not taken pity on you? In a mental home for weak-minded children.”

Rachel stood still, staring at the severed flounce which lay across Miss Garbutt's knee. There was no flickering of her lashes, no tremor of the lips. Her pale face might have been cut in marble. For the first time in her life she had been frozen into rigid revolt, a girl who was woman and somehow competent to hide all that was nascent in her. Then, she turned to the door, opened it, closed it with the look of a creature whose movements were mechanical, and whose consciousness was concentrated upon some secret purpose. She walked to the stairs, hesitated, and then turned towards the garden door.

Miss Garbutt was pouring herself out a cup of tea. The forbidden flounce lay in her lap. Well, that would be a lesson to Rose's daughter. She needed a firm hand, and Miss Garbutt reached out and collected a buttered scone.

Yes, Samuel's daughter should pay for her father's indiscretions.

-11 -

It was Dr. Lovell's custom to give the hour after Sunday tea to the beloved roses in his garden. He was a notable rosarian, and acted as judge in the local flower shows, and he could tell you the whole history of the Rose, Damask, Prevanche. His collection included York and Lancaster, and certain nameless roses which he had discovered in cottage gardens, and had exhibited and described in print. This Sunday hour was given to pleasure and a search for pests instead of patients, and Harrowfield, having a particular affection for its doctor, refrained from bothering him on these Sunday afternoons, unless the case was urgent. Dr. Lovell, smoking a pipe, was bending over a new Hybrid Tea, apricot and flame, when he heard a voice behind him.

"I'm sorry, sir, but someone wants to see you."

Dr. Lovell straightened, and removed the pipe from his mouth.

"Who, Maisie?"

"That girl from Miss Garbutt's. I tried to put her off, sir, but ----"

"About Miss Garbutt?"

"She wouldn't say, sir."

"Where is she, Maisie?"

"In the consulting room, sir."

Dr. Lovell looked at the bowl of his pipe.

"Ask her to come out into the garden."

"Very good, sir."

Dr. Lovell stood waiting, his pipe in his mouth, and his benign face thoughtful. A stretch of grass lay between the rose beds, and half way to the Georgian house a green seat waited in the shade of an old pear tree.

The doctor's eyes were on the garden door, and he saw the childish figure framed in it, its dark eyes set wide in a frightened face. Dr. Lovell had watched faces for many years and was quick to diagnose what might be described as the face behind the face. He had seen fear in many a human face, and he saw it in the face of Rachel Waters. She faltered, as many a patient had faltered, aware of some deadly disharmony within them, and dreaming the stark truth.

Dr. Lovell waved his hand to her.

"Hullo, Rachel. Come and see the roses."

Her hesitation paused. She came slowly across the lawn, and with an infinite seriousness, walking -- as the doctor thought -- like some pale little bride to her fate or her future, and yet how incongruous were those long legs and that stilted skirt. He smiled at her and nodded. Was he to be the priest, and she -- coming to some confessional? Her limpid dark eyes looked at him with strange steadfastness.

"I am sure you are fond of flowers, Rachel."

He spoke to her as to a child, yet seeing her somehow as woman. Her very face was flowerlike. And he was conscious of questioning provocation. Miss Garbutt had given that girl's age as twelve, but to Lovell's discerning eyes she was much older.

"Here's a new rose. How do you like it?"

He indicated Miss Apricot and Flame, using the stem of his pipe as a pointer, and he watched her as she gazed at it. As yet she had not spoken, and her young silence had for him profound implications. Had she come about her unpleasant aunt or about herself? About herself, of that he was strangely sure.

"It's beautiful, but I like that one better."

" Which one, my dear ? "

" The white one edged with carmine."

Were those the words of a child ? He took a pull at his pipe, and then he smiled at her.

" Can I help you in any way, Rachel ? "

She gazed steadily at the particular rose.

" Yes, Dr. Lovell. I want to ask you something."

" Well, ask it, my dear."

" Am I -- weak minded ? "

He looked at her, and was conscious of feeling shocked. What a question, how pregnant a question ! The problem which had been in his mind for many months took shape. He did not answer at once but pulled his pipe. Then, he held out a hand, smiling at her.

" Let's go and sit on that seat. I think I can answer that question. It is -- no."

He was aware of her face losing its set and young anxiety. She let him take her hand, and they walked together towards the seat under the pear tree. She sat down, but the doctor remained standing.

" How old are you, my dear ? "

" Aunt Kate says that I am twelve."

" And was it she who -- suggested ---- ? "

" Yes, Dr. Lovell. She says my mother died in a lunatic asylum."

Nice woman ! Dr. Lovell bit hard on the stem of his pipe. How damnable ! Yes, this was going to be no easy business, but deliberate, compassionate, and gradual. He went and stood behind the seat, and leaned over the back of it so that he was partly behind her.

" Rachel, my dear, I want to try and ask you some questions. Don't be shy

with me. Think of me as a friend and a doctor."

"Yes, Dr. Lovell."

"Now, tell me, are you happy at Mon Repos?"

She did not answer him for a moment and he could see her face go bleak.

"No, Dr. Lovell."

"I see. I wondered. And -- forgive me -- but I ask this as a doctor. Has your aunt told you that -- you -- are like your mother?"

"Yes, Dr. Lovell."

"Thank you, my dear. I think that is all I want to know. But -- there is just one more thing. Do you happen to know where you were born?"

"Yes, Dr. Lovell."

"Where?"

"At a place called Croydon."

"Croydon?"

"Yes, Dr. Lovell."

The doctor smiled to himself grimly over the back of the seat. So, that bespectacled virago could not misinterpret the whole of the story. And what lay behind this persecution? Some poison of jealousy which had eaten into a woman's secret self?

His pipe had gone out, and he knocked the ash from it.

"Have you had your tea, my dear?"

"No, Dr. Lovell. Aunt sent me away."

"Can you tell me why?"

Rachel looked at her knees.

"Because I had sewn a piece on to my skirt."

"And your aunt disapproved?"

"Yes, Dr. Lovell. She tore it off."

That, for the doctor, completed the picture, and what a picture ! He began to refill his pipe, frowning as he watched his own fingers. In his long experience he had come across such few cases of studied cruelty, persecution so considered and sinister. To dress a growing girl as a child, and in the pretence of keeping her immature, poison her youth with this taint of imbecility ! Had Miss Garbutt proposed by persistent suggestion to translate mere childishness into actual insanity ?

“ Rachel.”

“ Yes, Dr. Lovell ? ”

“ Does your aunt know that you are here ? I supposed not.”

“ She doesn’t know. I think I had better be going now.”

The doctor lit his pipe.

“ And I am going with you. We will walk round by the lane, and I shall say that I met you and that we went for a walk together. Do you understand ? ”

“ Yes, Dr. Lovell.”

“ Don’t be afraid, my dear. Wouldn’t you like some tea ? ”

“ Yes, Dr. Lovell.”

“ Well, come in and have some. My wife will be very glad to see you.”

Mary Lovell was the counterpart of her husband, big, fresh coloured, flexible, with much shrewdness behind her big blue eyes. A comfortable woman, Mary Lovell, whose only restraint upon her husband was that of chastening his generosity. Lovell was too much of a giver, if a man can suffer from an excess of such virtue, and the more plausible of his poorer patients were apt to impose upon him, but when her husband appeared with his hand on Rachel’s shoulder and gave his wife the most meaning of looks, she was quick enough in her response.

“ Rachel has had no tea, Mary. We can give her some, can’t we ? ”

“Of course. Come and sit on the sofa with me, Rachel. You might ring the bell, Frank.”

The doctor left them alone together and returning to his roses strolled around, his pipe in his mouth, his face profoundly thoughtful. Was interference indicated? Should he tackle that black beldam? Dr. Lovell might be the gentlest of men, with a deceptively quiet voice, but there were occasions when he could be quietly fierce and ruthless. Yes, and the girls real age? He would try for information on that point. It might prove significance.

So, Dr. Lovell, after an hour's strolling, returned to the drawing-room to collect Rachel Waters, and found her with a face that was soft and relaxed. So little kindness had she received that Mary Lovell's easy touch had smoothed out the wrinkles in her.

Dr. Lovell had collected a hat. He gave his wife another of those meaning glances.

“I am just going to see Rachel home.”

II

The doctor had changed his mind with regard to the way back to “Mon Repos”. It should be a public parade through Harrowfield, and not a surreptitious return to a garden gate. The sudden, hesitant and frightened look she gave him strengthened his decision.

“It's all right, Rachel. I am going to see your aunt and tell her I met you and took you in to tea. And that is quite true.”

Her troubled face touched him.

“Aunt Kate will be angry.”

"Leave that to me."

Harrowfield's High Street was somnolent and empty, as they were passing Mr. Roper's white door it opened and a man came out. Wynter had been having tea with the lawyer and hearing from him some of Harrowfield's history, for, though people were apt to say that nothing happened in the country, Mr. Roper could reply -- "Oh, doesn't it! Much happens in the country, and what is more -- people know what happens. Life's more intimate here, and we are given to gossip." Wynter raised his hat, being in Sabbath clothes for the occasion. He and Dr. Lovell had met and liked each other, for Wynter had gashed a finger with a billhook, and the doctor had dressed it for him.

"Hullo, sir. Hullo -- Rachel."

Dr. Lovell paused, and happening to glance at the girl, saw something in her face which challenged him. Had this nice lad and the girl met? If so -- how? And why those quivering lashes and that sudden colour?

"Rachel has been having tea with us. So you two know each other?"

Wynter laughed.

"Informally. Introduced by chance, weren't we, Rachel?"

The girl nodded, her dark eyes on Wynter's face.

"Rachel caught me in a tussle with our cultivator. Afraid I had lost my temper."

"Machinery can be cussed," smiled the doctor. "And how are apples?"

"Rather absent. Pests galore and patience needed."

Maybe he was conscious of Lovell's somewhat tense face, and the inferences of the situation. Ease was the thing, and ease and friendly chatter. Was the black beldam indisposed, and had Rachel been sent to fetch the doctor?

“ I am going your way. May I join you ? ”

Dr. Lovell gave him a straight and suggestive stare.

“ Why not ? I am seeing Rachel home. Dining anywhere tonight, Wynter ? ”

“ At the ‘ George ’.”

“ Come in afterwards and smoke a pipe.”

“ Thank your, sir. I’d love to.”

They moved on, Wynter taking the curb, and the girl walking between them. She looked at neither of the men, but straight ahead as though confronting some imminent and frightening catechism. What would Aunt Kate say to her ? And would Dr. Lovell have anything to say to Aunt Kate ? Between the two men she yet walked alone with her problem silencing her.

Wynter, conscious of the tension and of some unknown happenings which had caused it, made bright conversation, and meeting the doctor’s glance over the dark crown of the girl’s head, felt challenged and questioned by it. How did he shape in the trio, if he had any shape of human meaning ? That glance of the doctor’s had been both questioning and diagnostic. Was the physician on guard over the soul and body of a somewhat pathetic patient ? And was he being challenged as a man, the potential and casual cad, or as a creature of compassion and of integrity ? Well, he would smoke a pipe with Harrowfield’s physician, and over their pipes men can be frank with each other.

They came to the gate of “ Mon Repos ”, and Wynter, realising that he was no longer part of the picture, raised his hat again and smiled.

“ Goodbye, sir, see you later. Goodbye, Miss Waters.”

Miss Waters ! She flicked a glance at him, a smile-less glance. Was he making fun of her, with her gawky legs and skimped skirt ? The doctor had his hand on the gate. Playfulness, or irony ? Neither. This rather shy lad

with the quiet voice might have shown a sensitive prescience in saluting a vague maturity. Miss Rachel Waters, not a humiliated and frightened child whose sex and age were being misinterpreted.

The doctor nodded at him.

" See you about half past eight."

" Thank you, sir."

But they had been observed and it was Miss Garbutt herself who opened the door to them, and with an air of having been waiting upon tragedy. Accusation gloomed in her, but her first reaction was one of politeness to the doctor, for it was Lovell who opened a skirmish that might become a general action.

" Good afternoon. Rachel has been to tea with us, Miss Garbutt."

" Indeed ! "

She looked over the girl whose face was set and expressionless.

" May I come in for a minute or two ? "

The doctor's voice was quiet and courteous. He believed in the soft approach, friendliness before frenzy. Miss Garbutt gave him a reconnoitring stare.

" Certainly. You can go to your room, Rachel."

Dr. Lovell patted the girl's shoulder.

" Run along, my dear. Perhaps your aunt will show me her roses."

Roses ! My rosy rapture -- this, but gradual and lurid storm-clouds. Combat might be in the air, but for the moment a stiff courtesy prevailed. Miss Garbutt, having watched Rachel climb the stairs, turned with large impressiveness upon the doctor.

" Now, Dr. Lovell, shall we go into the garden ? "

The she-spider and the interfering fly ! Dr. Lovell sensed menace, and

was ready to counter it, but the outcome was to be other than he expected. He had known Miss Garbutt as a patient, but not in the part of a woman who might give much more than she received.

“ May I ask, Dr. Lovell, how this came about ? ”

“ You mean ---- ? ”

“ My niece being in your house.”

Dr. Lovell put his hands in his pockets, strolled towards the flower bed, and assumed a contemplative air.

“ May I ask you a question, Miss Garbutt, before I answer or refuse to answer yours ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ How old is your niece ? ”

“ And what right do you have to ask that question ? Please understand that I admit no interference in my affairs.”

The doctor swung round and faced her.

“ One moment, madam. Supposing your niece is my patient, would not that persuade you to realise ---- ”

He had pulled the fatal handle and the deluge descended upon him. Arrogance ! A great black crow cawing at him. Why, the woman herself was mad, both bad and mad. Dr. Lovell had much experience of emotional tempests, but never a storm such as this. He stood and listened with an almost whimsical and half smiling frown while this primitive virago flayed him. Incredible insolence. Who did he think he was ? A doctor and a gentleman ? She gabbled at him with hysterical fury, mouthing, her head twitching, her eyes almost insanely red behind their lenses. Lovell went cold as ice. What this woman needed was a wet towel flicking at her face.

His voice was quiet.

“ I see. You cannot answer my question. In that case, madam, I can draw the obvious inference.”

But her arrogance was unabated.

“ Get out of my garden, man. And don't you dare to interfere in my affairs.”

“ May I suggest, madam, that it may be my affair, as your niece's doctor.”

“ Doctor ! When she needs a doctor -- I shall know who to consult.”

“ The choice may not be yours. May I warn you, Miss Garbutt, that other people may be interested -- when the question of cruelty arises.”

And then he left her.

- 12 -

Dr. Lovell returning by way of the field path to take six o'clock surgery, could recall other cases in which this passion to dominate had manifested, especially so in women. The case of Miss Catherine Garbutt was singular only in its unexpected violence, and in an arrogance that was supervious to the human touch. Cross her, and the screaming hag appeared in the place of a person who would have described herself as an English gentlewoman. H'm yes ! Ugly within and ugly without, unloved and unliked, and seething like some muddy pond, with strange larval life. There were women who nagged at and bullied their husbands, who terrorised their children, or if such victims were lacking, made life a hell for some poor relation. Two or three generations ago Miss Garbutt might have found herself in the ducking stool, coercion but no cure. Men got about in the world and knocked up against each other and had their surliness rubbed smooth, but woman might go sour and prickly in her round of domestic chores, and even more so if she had no chores to do. The woman was not sane, much less sane than the child she was persecuting.

Dr. Lovell made it a rule never to discuss patients with his wife, but the Garbutt-Waters ménage was an exception. Before sitting down to Sunday supper he wrote a letter and enclosed a cheque to a certain official. The official world might be able and willing to give him the date of Rachel Water's birth. At supper he was in a silent mood, and Mary Lovell waited upon his silence. She had the supreme virtue of being able to let a man alone. When her husband had something to say to her he would say it.

"What did you think of that girl?"

Mary Lovell considered the question before answering it.

"A frightened and sensitive creature who has been kept in a cage."

Admirable! Mary Lovell had a way of giving you a picture in one simple phrase.

"Sums up the case exactly. How did her mentality strike you, Mary?"

"Well, that of a caged creature, and a gentle creature. And for once she had got out of the cage."

"What would you take her age to be?"

His wife gave him a considering look.

"You don't accept the official figure?"

"I am in search of the official figure. Well, what is your guess?"

"Fifteen dressed as twelve."

Dr. Lovell passed his plate for more gooseberry tart and cream. He was a fruitarian as well as a lover of roses.

"I think you are right. The Garbutt woman's idea has been to keep her infantile."

"Why, Frank?"

"Some elemental spite -- of a septic sort. I had a meeting with the lady. Arrogance in excelsis."

"It would be."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, just the feel of things. I've met her on committees."

Lovell said no more for a minute or so, and his wife waited.

"About a case for the courts, Mary; I said so, and she shouted me off the premises. I have never known a woman go hag with such thoroughness."

"Some women do, my dear."

"I know, but not women who are supposed to know better."

"Any family history?"

" I want to find out. I did not feel like putting the girl through too much of an ordeal. I suspect that she has had enough of that. Oh, by the way, Wynter is coming in presently. Nice lad. Have you met him ? "

" I think I have seen him. Fairisle pullover and brown shorts."

Her husband twinkled.

" A little more than that. At present he is rather the village joke."

" I don't always like the village jokes. Cheap and spiteful. He's the lad, isn't he, who bought poor old Carter's orchard ? "

" Yes."

" But isn't it half derelict ? "

" No -- there is life in many of the old trees yet. Besides, I think there are other urges."

" Poetry and back to the land ? "

" That's rather naughty of you, my dear. Wynter fought with the International Brigade in Spain. Got buried by a bomb, but managed to get home -- with a neurosis."

" Poor lad. But surely a place like Carter's Orchard ---- ? "

" The English scene, Mary ; profoundly peaceful, and if you eschew the daily paper, far away from political gabble. Wynter told me one of two things about himself ; used a strange phrase about losing himself in an apple tree."

" I rather like that phrase, Frank."

" I think you would like Wynter. Straight in the eyes, quiet voice, manners, not too quick on the smile."

" And losing and finding himself in an apple tree. I hope he won't be found like poor old Carter."

" I rather think not."

II

There happened to be staying at the "George" a florid and self-opinionated gentleman who talked mysteriously and over-much to the Merry family in the "Cubbyhole", and he talked of Germany and Central Europe. Wynter, who had been invited to join the party in a glass of Port, refused the drink but stood just inside the sacred door, smoking his pipe and listening to a monologue from this self-appointed prophet. The Misses Merry, who had been more ready for glad glances than lectures on foreign affairs, had kept a corner for Bill Wynter, but Wynter remained somewhat darkly by the door, listening with a tense and attentive face to words of ill omen.

"You can take it from me, there will be war next year. All this chatter about the Sudenland is just gaff. The whole trouble is that Germany has re-armed to the teeth, and she's not interested in appeasement and peace."

Mr. Merry took up the argument.

"But isn't Hitler bluffing?"

"Not a bit of it. I have been over there for a year. I can't tell you what for. That's secret. Our people won't see that Hitler is playing blind man's bluff with us; he wants us to think he is bluffing. The truth is he is in damned earnest."

"So the Spanish business ----?"

"Just a try out, and a pretty good one. And they tell me we haven't a tank in the country that's fit to fight, and about a dozen anti-aircraft guns."

"I can't believe that, sir."

"Believe it or not, it's true."

The girls were getting restive. Marie glanced towards the door, and saw

no one there, for William Wynter had slipped out and away. Perhaps he had felt bored by this mysterious know-all's harangue. But Wynter had not been bored by it, but moved to forebodings, a fear of the future which had been one of his hauntings during his illness. War, war, war! Would fool-man never grow up, but continue to be a strutting lout, whose symbols were the bomb and the Tommy-gun?

For the moment he had forgotten his visit to Dr. Lovell's and was half way down the quiet street when he remembered the doctor's invitation. It was growing dark, and windows were showing lights, and a few stars pricked the sky in the black-blue vault above the little town. Wynter turned and stood rigid as though frozen by some prophetic horror. Even the stillness might conceal an imagined menace, that dreadful droning which had become associated in his consciousness with what he had suffered in Spain. Would bombs crash upon this peaceful little English town, and houses come slithering down? Sudden fear was with him, an almost uncontrollable fear, and a fear that was to be dreaded, making of him a terrified animal lying paralysed and unable to move.

He turned abruptly and made for the doctor's house. Being alone was itself a terror. He wanted to be with some other human creature, in some calm and reassuring presence. He was shaking, and his heart was racing, the rhythm of a fear he knew too well.

He rang the doctor's bell, and it was Lovell himself who came to the door.

"Hullo, Wynter, here you are."

His voice was quietly cheerful and welcoming. There was a light in the hall, and when it showed him Wynter's face, he was surprised and shocked by it. Pallor, a glistening forehead, eyes wide and prominent, pinched features. The lad looked as though he had seen a ghost, the ghost of his

own sick self.

“ Afraid I’m late, sir.”

“ Not a bit. Let’s go through the garden.”

“ Yes, I’d like the garden, sir.”

“ Shall I lead the way ? ”

A cool, darkish passage, a soft greenness that was growing grey, and the doctor’s rosebeds like a dim tapestry spread under a fading afterglow. Even the other man’s broadish back was reassuring, and the slight limp in his walk human and consoling. Wynter pulled himself together, squared his shoulders, and bade that fool heart of his stop thudding in chest and ears. Lovell was making for the seat under the pear tree where he had listened to a young girl’s story of repression and of fear, and here was Bill Wynter looking like a scared boy who had seen a dead man hanging blue-faced in an apple tree.

“ Sit down, Wynter. Got your pipe ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And tobacco ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

How like these monosyllabic responses were to those that the girl had given him.

Both men filled their pipes, Wynter with fingers that felt brittle and flurried. The blood was still pounding in his ears. Ye gods, was he so cowardly and hypersensitive that casual gossip in a country pub could put him in such a palpitating sweat ? But was it just gossip ? Had he not been oppressed by the feeling that what had happened in Spain would happen again and with a universal frightfulness. He had filled his pipe, but when he struck a match and tried to put the flame to the tobacco his fingers were

so shaky that the flame wavered to and fro. And then another and more actual fear possessed him. Would the man beside him observe his quakings? The fear was valid. Dr. Lovell had seen that wavering flame.

He made no comment, though his response was inward. What the devil was the matter with William Wynter? Had he been drinking? But there was no reek of alcohol, and the face he had seen in the lighted passage had suggested over-stimulation of a subtler sort.

Then there came to Wynter one of those moods of utter candour which men show to each other in the nearness of death. "Gosh, I'm as windy as hell today." And suddenly Wynter laughed, the desperate laughter of the dug-out and the trenches.

"Sorry, sir, I've got wind up. Thought I was through with it. Damned silly to flop over a bit of casual gossip."

Lovell was lighting his pipe, and the silence held for a second or two.

"What was the gossip?"

"Oh, a fellow in the 'George'. Said war was certain next year, if not before. You see, sir, I've seen modern war."

"Have you, Wynter? Where?"

"In Spain. Like a mad idiot I went out and joined the International Brigade. It did not take long to cure me of that sort of idealism. Pretty lousy lot -- some of those Reds. Then I got buried by a bomb. But haven't I told you all this before?"

"So the gentleman in the 'George' prophesised war. And had he any authority?"

"He said he had been in Germany for a year, and knew what was happening, and that we were blind asses and had damn hell to fight with. It shouldn't have put the wind up me, but it did, sir."

Lovell, who had suffered the mud and boredom and blood and horror of the previous war, and emerged from it with a limping leg, knew all about wind-up. Had he not suffered it, and as a regimental doctor had to deal with it with cool and impartial ruthlessness. How often had he had to decide whether a badly frightened man was worth while, or better at the Base. And now, on this serene summer night he had a frightened man beside him, and he remembered some of his own fear.

“ I know what wind-up is like, Wynter. I was in the other war.”

“ Were you, sir ? ”

“ Yes, Gallipoli and France. Got a Blighty in the Ypres salient. This leg. Wasn't sorry. But if there is a war, you wouldn't be in it.”

“ Why not, sir ? ”

“ If there is war, and this old country is in its usual state of utter innocence, we may be -- starved.”

“ Food shortage ? ”

“ Of course. And you are on the land. That old orchard might be a blessing for you and for others. Moreover, if you have been what we used to call shell-shocked, you would not be passed for active service.”

Wynter's heart had calmed down, and he was pulling hard at his pipe.

“ I might not like a civilian funk-hole.”

“ Look at it rationally, my lad. The thing is to leave a man where he is doing the best work.”

The after-glow had faded out and so had the colour of the flowers. A beautiful cool stillness prevailed, and the dew was falling. Wynter sat forward on the seat, his elbows on his knees, for out of fear other inspirations had sprung like germinating seed. Fruit, food, useful labour. He had intended planting a few dozen soft fruit bushes ; he would

treble that quantity. More dying trees should be felled, and more ground ploughed up. Well, he might owe that fellow in the "George" a debt of gratitude for scaring him into fore-sight and new enthusiasms.

Meanwhile Dr. Lovell's thoughts had passed to his other patient. Strange that two frightened young things should have come to confide him in one day. Such faith in you warmed your vitals.

"I say, sir."

"Yes."

"Out of evil earth good. I'll plant more fruit up there."

"Good idea, William."

"Not William, sir. Why not Bill?"

"Bill it shall be. By the way, you remember the girl I was with -- Rachel Waters?"

"Yes, sir."

"What would you guess her age to be?"

Wynter hesitated.

"Oh, she rather suggests fourteen dressed as eleven. I'm afraid the poor kid has a pretty rotten time."

"I rather think she has."

"Couldn't something be done about it?"

"Possibly."

- 13 -

Dr. Lovell waited for three days, without making any further approach to " Mon Repos ". He met Miss Garbutt once in the High Street, and she waddled by him with conscious unconsciousness, though Lovell had raised his hat. He might be the kindest of men, but when that very kindness was involved in some human issue, he -- in his quiet way -- was a man to be feared. Dr. Lovell said to himself -- " Very good, my lady. If things turn out as I hope they will, you may hear more from me."

Dr. Lovell waited, and then the official communication reached him from Somerset House, and it gave him the information he had hoped for. A Rachel Mary Waters had been born at Croydon, the daughter of Rose and Samuel Waters on August 5th, 1922. Dr. Lovell smiled sternly over that communication and passed it across the table to his wife.

" So the girl is sixteen in a month or two."

" What a nasty trick, Frank ! Isn't there some legal point ? "

" Very much so, if I'm not mistaken. I'll see Roper about it."

And see Augustus Roper he did. He quoted a case without mentioning names, and the legal position was what he had offered a possible explanation.

" It may have been jealousy, Frank."

" Of what ? "

" It might have been her sister. Supposing Rachel's mother married the man Miss Garbutt had marked down for herself."

" Yes, quite possible. Revenge on the child. But to keep it up for years. Doesn't sound quite credible."

Mary Lovell smiled at him tolerantly.

"To you, no, Frank, in spite of psychiatry and the modern study of mental sepsis. But to an ugly woman, ugly within and without, it might be like man's passion for hunting, her prime source of amusement."

"Yes, it might. But what are we going to do about it? I don't like the idea of crashing in. Might precipitate some sort of crisis. If she is cruelty-mad she might disappear with the girl."

"Wait a moment, dear. I think I have an idea. A kind of test case. I'll ask Rachel to tea, write a personal note to her."

"Ignoring the ogre?"

"Quite so. She may come and she may not. If she does not come we can infer coercion."

"Yes, it's a good idea. And if she comes?"

His wife sat smiling with a suggestion of conscious mischief.

"I may have another idea."

"You seem full of them this morning. And if she does not come?"

"I -- might go and see Miss Garbutt."

II

For three days Rachel had been locked in her bedroom, Miss Garbutt keeping the key and accompanying Eliza when the girl's meals were brought to her, and very sketchy meals they were. They had taken her frocks away -- there were just two of them -- so that no escape by way of window or rainpipe was likely. Rachel had spent the first day in tears, the second in silent sulking, the third in secret but positive revolt. If these two large bullies were too strong for her in physical combat, she could use cunning and dissemble her young angers.

"I am sorry, Aunt Kate. Please forgive me."

"That will depend, young woman, on your future behaviour."

So, Rachel was allowed downstairs, but not yet into the garden, and the garden back-gate was chained and padlocked.

"You will attend to your lessons."

The books might be there, but her thoughts and her urges were elsewhere. Why shouldn't she run away? But then the police would find her and bring her back to her prison. Miss Garbutt was always emphasizing the powers and uses of the police. If she had work to do, work like William Wynter's in that orchard? She wanted to use her hands and her heart, and give as she had never been given to.

Her aunt was out, shopping in Westings, and Eliza was busy in the kitchen when the letter was slipped through the front door letter-box. Rachel had been to a certain place, and was crossing the hall at the moment. She saw the white oblong lying on the mat, picked it up, read.

"Miss Rachel Waters."

Slipping back into the library she sat down at her table and laid the letter on a page of her book. She listened. Then she slit the envelope, drew out the sheet and read.

Dear Rachel,

Would you come to tea with me today?

Say four o'clock. I shall be delighted to see you.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Lovell

Miss Garbutt was making a day of it at Westings, and Eliza had had

instructions to keep both doors locked and an eye on Miss Rachel, but windows cannot be locked, and Eliza fell asleep on the kitchen sofa. Rachel, in blue serge flagger's frock, escaped hatless by the drawing-room window, and very conscious of her short skirts, reached Harrowfield's High Street. A dozen motor-coaches were parked on the Green, and the place was crowded with trippers from Westings, and Rachel felt part of an anonymous crowd, and less noticeable to the good people of Harrowfield. She rang the front door bell, and the maid who answered it smiled upon her. The girl had been prompted ; moreover, gossip did not flatter Kate Garbutt.

"Come in, Miss. The mistress is expecting you."

The little Georgian house might have known pain and fear and suffering, but it was a peaceful house in which two good comrades shared a profound and intimate affection. You could breathe easily and deeply in this house, and sit down in a chair that seemed to accept you like a friendly lap. It did not eye you censoriously, or think other things about you behind a shallow smirk.

"Hullo, Rachel, my dear."

And Mary Lovell kissed her, and that kiss made Rachel forget her clipped hair and inadequate skirts. Moreover Mary Lovell could observe things without making it obvious that she was doing so, but her inward comments were caustic. What an unpleasant and cruel trick to play upon a child, and what a transformation could be worked here with a few feminine touches.

The teapot arrived and was placed amid the scones and cakes. What a tea ! Rachel, who had been rationed for three days on plain bread, sodden fish and rice pudding, was healthily piqued. And it had been spread for her ! Then, sitting on the sofa beside her hostess, she became aware of her so

obvious knees. She tried to pull her skirt down, but it failed to respond.

Mrs. Mary had noticed the gesture. If there was compassionate mischief in her, and there was, the cruelty of that skimpy skirt provoked it. Should she dare, and suffer the girl to a dare feminine experiment? Perhaps.

"You must have grown -- in the last few months, Rachel."

"I have. Please forgive -- my clothes."

"Sugar, dear?"

"Please."

"Help yourself. Yes, there are all sorts of ways of helping yourself."

The girl glanced quickly at her, and met those kind blue eyes. Was this an invitation to eager confidences? Someone to talk to, someone who would understand, someone whom you could trust?

"May I tell you something, Mrs. Lovell?"

"Of course. Go ahead, my dear."

"Aunt Kate won't let me have longer frocks."

"By the way, does she know you are here?"

"No. She is in Westings. I wasn't supposed ----"

But there she faltered, suddenly subdued, and bleakly serious. She looked at her plate, and Mrs. Lovell saw a slight tremor of those black stockinged knees. How abominable! Fear, a frustrating dread of storms and reprisals. Dr. Lovell's wife was moved to beneficent anger.

"I think I understand, my dear. You need not worry to tell me things."

The hazel eyes lifted to her suddenly with a gleam of gratitude.

"Thank you."

"I think we will play a game, presently."

"Yes, Mrs. Lovell."

"I have a frock I can spare. We will try it on you."

"I'd love to try it. But I couldn't keep it. Aunt Kate would be so angry."

Mrs. Lovell's inward retort was -- "Let her be angry."

Mary Lovell's bedroom overlooked the garden and her husband's roses, and the frock she had chosen for the transformation of Rachel was rosy and sentimental, perhaps a little out of fashion, for Mary Lovell had shed it years ago, the reason being a comfortable embonpoint. Cerise roses on a white ground. As she held it over her arm she saw the girl's eyes glow, for Rachel had never enjoyed so pretty a thing as this.

"Isn't it lovely?"

"I used to be rather fond of it, my dear, but I've grown too fat. Let's try it on you."

Sudden confusion and shyness. And why? Mary Lovell jumped to the inference. The girl's underclothing? Indeed -- in the old tongue -- unmentionables!

"I'll leave you to it, Rachel."

She observed the girl's look of relief.

"May I come downstairs in it?"

"Of course, my dear. My husband will be in soon. But don't be shy."

She left her and returning to the drawing-room, sat down with significant smile. Maybe a woman could prepare more mordent and educative surprises for another woman than any man. Was the girl looking at herself in the long mirror? Probably. And with what reactions? Mrs. Lovell lighted a cigarette, and smoked it as though the thing had an unusual and pleasing savour.

Rachel Waters may have led a suppressed and cloistered life, but even Miss Garbutt did not eschew magazines for a gentlewomen, and Rachel had

had her opportunities of peeping at frocks and lingerie and pictures of fascinating mannequins, so now she looked at her reflection in Mary Lovell's long mirror and saw herself transformed. With an innocent delight and vanity she posed, and her postures were copied from some of the fashion pictures she had seen. She fluttered her hands, turned sideways, looked over her shoulder. But what a pity that her head was cropped like a boy's ! It needed the shadow and the softness of a coronet of dark hair.

Then, a sudden shyness took possession of her. She must not keep Mrs. Lovell waiting, and yet ---- . Nor did she know that the doctor had come home and was being prompted by his wife.

" She is putting on one of my frocks, that old white one with roses."

" I always liked you in that one, Mary."

" Yes, but not now, mutton dressed as lamb. Aren't you interested in the experiment ? "

" Very much so."

" Ring the bell, Frank. You want fresh tea."

Rachel, descending the stairs like some self-conscious debutante, heard two voices and hesitated. Almost she fled back up the stairs, but was caught by the maid who came to answer the bell. Bells had to ring in a doctor's house. The girl smiled at her, and Rachel smiled back, and taking the last steps at a run though to cross her Rubicon, appeared with an air of sudden solemnity before her audience. She looked first at Mrs. Lovell, and then at the doctor.

" Hullo, Rachel."

She stood quite still, hands hanging at her sides, and Dr. Lovell and his wife, intrigued by the transformation, did not hear that other bell, or

maybe they heard the familiar tinge of it and let it pass as without significance. A message or a patient, and for the moment such happenings could wait.

“ My dear, it’s just right for you. Don’t you think so, Frank ? ”

“ I do.” And Dr Lovell was thinking -- “ Now she looks her age, and the pretty thing she should be.”

The maid had gone to answer the front door bell, and distant voices reached them, one so aggressive and familiar that all the glow and the douceness went out of Rachel’s face. Her aunt ! What -- would -- happen ?

The maid came to the door.

“ Miss Garbutt, madam, inquiring for Miss Rachel.”

Dr. Lovell looked at his wife, and she knew that look.

“ Come and sit by me, dear.”

And Dr. Lovell said, “ Ask Miss Garbutt in.”

Miss Catharine Garbutt, received with a bland and almost welcoming politeness, should have been disconcerted by it, and was not. She did not come in with thunder like Kipling’s dawn, but smiled -- owl-eyed -- at the flowery figure of her niece, and with swarthy impressiveness, accepted a chair and a cigarette. Had she had tea ? Yes, thank you. But her spectacles focussed the situation and its unexplained reality, and were full of restrained interrogation. Miss Garbutt was playing a puss-puss, claws concealed, eyes on the other cat, and not upon her niece.

Dr. Lovell was puzzled, and he filled a pipe. No arrogance today, and why ? Had the black bedlam also taken legal opinion, and become more wisely careful ? His wife was lighting a second cigarette.

Mrs. Lovell, feeling that she had a peculiar problem to deal with, reacted more subtly than her husband.

" We did not know you were out for the day, Miss Garbutt. I sent a note to Rachel asking her here to tea."

" Most kind of you, I'm sure."

" And we played at frocks -- an old one of mine. Don't you think it suits her ? "

Rachel, very still and rigid on the sofa, felt the scorch of those glassed eyes.

" I do. Of course -- she is too young to do it justice."

Dr. Lovell took the pipe out of his mouth, met his wife's eyes, and was silent.

" Do you ? I think she looks rather sweet in it."

Miss Garbutt beamed upon them both.

" Really, we must not take up any more of your time. I was rather worried about the child. Go up and change, my dear. We must be getting home."

Rachel rose slowly to her feet, but that was not quite the end.

" I have made her a present of the frock, Miss Garbutt."

Miss Garbutt smiled as though highly pleased.

" How very kind of you. Well, fetch your other frock, my dear. I want you to pick raspberries for me."

And when they had gone Dr. Lovell said to his wife, " What is the old beast's game ? "

- 14 -

Coincidences were in fashion, for William Wynter, coming in after a day's work to do some shopping, met Miss Garbutt and her niece on their way home to "Mon Repos". If the transformation had surprised Dr. Lovell it was even more so for Wynter. Wynter's stare preceded the lifting of his hat, a stare that had no rudeness in it. And then he became aware of the frightened eyes in that other face, and was suddenly poignantly challenged. His feeling was that Rachel did not want him to stop, and that she was afraid of contacts, with that ominous figure beside her.

He passed by, and Miss Garbutt asked the obvious question.

"The young man who grows apples, I believe?"

"Yes, Aunt Kate."

"And how did you come to meet him?"

"Oh, he is a friend of Dr. Lovell's."

"Indeed. I think you had better change that frock before you pick raspberries."

Wynter had noticed that old garment folded over Rachel's arm, and it too had posed a problem. Had Miss Garbutt relented, and gone forth on a shopping expedition with her niece? But Harrowfield could not have supplied that flowery creation, and Wynter wondered, and wondered still more at the fluctuation of his emotional impressions, and at the subtle significance of a frock. Assuredly the ancients had been more wise in the cult of costume, and the new nudities had deprived woman of much of her mystery and allure, if modern man asked for such things. And did he? Hardly so in a world that was losing its graciousness and its mystery, and the voice of the lout was a universal, and to speak English as Shakespeare

might have spoken it was almost offence to the multitude. Yes, you might bathe with a girl and lose all illusions about her legs and her figure, and accept sex as an in and out affair, and marry a mother and a cook, but was all out to be jettisoned? Not the art of painting toe-nails and plucking eyebrows, but a cult that was more complex and eternal and internal, Juliet at a high and mysterious window and not sprawling by her Romeo in smoked glasses and a minute belly-band.

So absorbed was William Wynter in these reflections upon life and the transforming mischief of a frock that he walked up Harrowfield High Street head in air, and cut Miss Millicent Merry who was prepared to give him glamour.

“Hullo, Bill. Gone wooing?”

Bill came to earth, turned with an apologetic grin, and lifted a hat.

“Sorry, I was up in the air. Out of smokes.”

Said the youngest Miss Merry, “I should say so. You’ve passed the tobacco shop.”

So he had. But worrying somehow did not apply to his appreciation of things feminine. It lacked tenderness and the more sensitive tremors.

At “Mon Repos,” Rachel having changed her frock, and hung the new creation in her cupboard, went down to pick raspberries for the household. Her inward questionings were with her as she gathered fruit into a clip punnet. Why was Mrs. Lovell so kind and generous to a girl who was almost a stranger? What had Mr. Wynter thought of her in her new frock? And why had Aunt Kate shown such sudden unexpected complacency, called her “My dear”, and suffered her to keep that which Mrs. Lovell had given her? Rachel could answer none of these questions, and especially so the last one, nor would any answer she could have given had been valid.

Aunt Kate might be pretending to be pleased in order that the ultimate vengeance might be more emphatic.

Rachel did allow herself a few of the raspberries, looking carefully about her before she slipped the fruit between her lips. Did Mr. Wynter grow raspberries? It must be a happy life in an orchard, with no one to stare, and no rude children to shout at you. Rachel had suffered from the Harrowfield children, and especially so from the male urchins, for rude children have an unholy quickness in finding the fight and cruel thing so say.

“Look at ‘er legs.”

“She ain’t quite all there.”

“‘Allo, Ninny!”

II

Miss Garbutt was seated at her bureau. She had locked the door, and slid from under the pigeon-holes of the bureau a secret drawer, and taken from it certain documents and old photos. She had in her fat and stubby fingers the photo of Samuel Waters, handsome, impudent, the promiscuous egoist written all over him. What a cad, but what a man! Turgid Katharine had seethed for him, played for him, surrendered to him, and then -- he married her sister.

The documents contained facts with which Miss Garbutt was only too familiar, and she was as well informed as to the legal position as was Dr. Lovell. Maybe this particular gambit was drawing to a conclusion. Some people might be wise as to the situation. Had the presentation of that frock conveyed a hint and a warning?

So, Katharine Garbutt, who had given herself to hate, sat in contemplation of that photograph of a sensual cad. She, Katharine Garbutt, had been seduced by him, but no Rachel has resulted. Even fertility had been denied her and the powers of coercion that might have been hers.

Samuel was dead, Rose was dead, but the tormenting product of their bodies lived on, and to this woman an eternal provocation. If Rosa Waters had not been sane, the same could be said in a more sinister way of her sister. This child had been a kind of symbol upon which Kate Garbutt had expended all the black mysteries of her soured and secret self, and now the pattern of her persecution might be changing. The girl was escaping in the woman. And how could the girl be hurt as woman ?

She was putting documents and photo back into their secret drawer when a peculiarly unpleasant thought came to her, unpleasant in its cunning, but pleasant as to prospect. So arrestive was it that a fat white hand come to rest upon the unclosed drawer. Had the father's picture presented her with an alternative portrait of Rachel as woman ? Might not Samuel be developed in the daughter, and to an ultimate and squalid shabbiness ? Miss Garbutt remembered certain words of Eliza's ----

" We'll have to watch out for the butcher's boy."

Miss Garbutt's hand gave a sudden push to the drawer. Butcher boy ? No, that would not be adequate. What if Rosa's child became the love-fool of a second Samuel ? The sins of the father might be paid for by the shaming of the daughter.

III

William Wynter came to the orchard gate, and stood leaning against it,

nor was it a gate that asked for gentleness and consideration, but a new and sturdy structure of English oak. He saw the evening sunlight upon the old trees, and he had no illusions about this year's bareness. They had set less than a hundred apples and many of these had been attacked by the codlin moth and grub. Yet, over garden a broad drift of clean brown soil waited for the autumn's planting, new life amid the old, and its promise was consoling. Nor were those old trees beyond hope. Old Tom was as consoling as the symbolic soil.

" We'll band 'em, and scrape 'em, and cut out the dead wood, ssir, and spray 'em, and I could swear they'll give 'ee a crop that'll make they envious chaps look sick."

Wynter had replied, " Are other fellows pleased to see another man -- fail ? "

" Most of 'em be. Men be spiteful creatures."

Tom was a shrewd master of craft. He could have given Wynter a dissertation upon apples and upon women. Not his old woman, no, ssir ; she was not the common, crowdy sort. Eve and apples. Yes, woman, singing " Abide with Me " one moment, and then digging a poisoned tongue into some other woman -- ten ticks afterwards. And for why ? Just to get change back out of someone else, because she was feeling sour about something, or jealous and spiteful. Yes, ssir, marking and prodding people with pins was the ignorant woman's idea of fun. It made her feel good. And then she'd go on with her hymn-singing.

" Peace, perfect, peace, ssir ! And don't you believe it. There be'n't no peace for a chap with most of the wenches. That be only a fellah 'd rather keep a dog. No, my ol' woman be different. Comfortable, and sleeps sound at night, and likes her cup 'o tea, and ain't for ever proddin' you in the

back.”

Wynter, remembering some of these Lavender Ladies, broke into an almost noiseless laugh. But challenging his consciousness was the picture of a young girl in a flowery frock. What a transformation ! Douce, shy, liquid of eye, suddenly mysterious. And what was the esoteric significance of the transformation ? Had the Black Beldam suffered a change of heart, or was it one of Tom’s interludes when jealous hags took to singing hymns ?

Wynter straddled the gate and swung himself down into the orchard. He idled with long loose strides towards the cottage, following no straight course but the undulating path of a man deep in thought whose legs were suffered to move as they pleased. Life inside the cottage had become a little sketchy, for Wynter’s urge was to be out on the land, and household chores were perfunctory. A bed had to be made and sheets changed and slops disposed of, but why bother about dust ? Wynter had eliminated what he described as the essentials and had simplified the household ritual by washing and shaving in the kitchen and allowing sheets and pillow-cases to last for a fortnight instead of for a week. The same applied to shirts and pyjamas, and even with such economy the laundry box had to be got ready for that damned van and the equally damned lout who left you and the laundry in the lurch on any possible excuse. As for the sanitary bucket, it insisted upon punctual service, or became more than an outspoken and candid friend. In fact, William Wynter, without being conscious of it, was becoming an incipient sloven so far as domestic duties were concerned. Like most men, he considered such activities to be a feminine perquisite, without pausing to wonder whether they might be as perpetual and boring to woman as they were to man.

He unlocked the green door, threw his hat on the oak chest in the narrow

passage, and that same hat would leave a dust pattern on the dark oak. Those long and limber legs of his carried him into the kitchen, for he was living largely in the kitchen, and there the realities of domestic life confronted him with callous candour, a two days' collection of unwashed crockery piled upon the sink's dresser.

Wynter came out of his sentimental stupor and said, "Damn."

But cursing the stuff would not wash it. Moreover, it produced in him a sharp reaction, vague self nausea, and the accusation that he had become a somewhat dirty beast. What would any woman think of that greasy mess? Feel sympathy for a lone man, or be repelled by a particular man's slovenliness?

Hot water was needed, much hot water, and the production of much hot water was not a matter of magic in his old-fashioned cottage. The Primus stove or the cottage copper? The oil stove's capacity was limited, and the stoking of the copper was a slow and laborious business. Well, was it not his own fault, sins of omission piling up on you like dirty plates? If he washed up after every meal the oil stove might serve.

William Wynter took off his coat and got to work. Yes, modern gadgets, and gas and electricity were not to be despised by a lone bachelor, but in the case of Carter's cottage they were -- for financial reasons -- out of the question for the moment. The oil stove would have to heat a succession of kettles, and Wynter assayed the washing-bowl and dumped some soda into it. A dish-cloth and a drying-cloth hung on a piece of string by the window, and a bucket of water waited under the sink. Wynter filled the kettle and lit the stove. Yes, when he could afford it he would go in for a home-gas unit and stove. And what was that scuttling across the back yard? Not a rat -- surely -- at this time of day! Leaning forward over

the sink to look, his nose came within a few inches of the cloths hanging on their miniature line, and a sour and unpleasant odour assailed him.

He pulled the dish-cloth off the string, and held it to his nose. Paugh, the thing stank ! It was foul and slimy. And who's fault was that ? None the less he balled the beastly thing and chucked it into a corner of the sink and going to a cupboard, took out a clean cloth.

Yes, a woman might insist upon a proper supply of clean clothes, especially any sensitive woman who could carry a flowery frock.

- 15 -

Sudden freedom, sudden smiles, though Miss Garbutt's gig lamps were headlights in a fog. What did it all signify? No more incarceration in pinnies, no more locked gates. Even Eliza produced glum smiles, and a crusty courtesy. A magician might have waved a wand over "Mon Repos," and transformed that sullen little house and its inhabitants into beings of comfortable beneficence.

Why would Miss Bumpus prove so pliable, while not looking the part with her lumpy old face and turbulent thighs and posterior?

"Eliza, I think I have been making a mistake. It is time Miss Rachel grew up."

Eliza had grunted. Judging by certain sanitary articles the girl was very much grown up.

"Yes, miss."

"Perhaps we shall find her more responsive."

Responsive was not quite the word with which to describe Rachel's reaction to this new humanism. It left her mystified, slightly dazzled, breathless, and questioning. Had Dr. Lovell said something to her aunt which had initiated a revolution in the affairs of "Mon Repos"? It might be so, and Rachel could say no more than that.

Ten shillings a week pocket-money!

It seemed untold riches, and the first time that she received it in the shape of four half-crowns, she sat on her bed, and with the money cupped in one hand, and wondered. It was like a fairy tale in which the harsh aunt is charged into beneficent fairy godmother, and Rachel was touched.

Sensitive and warm hearted, she went forth and spent half the first week's

allowance on a present to Aunt Kate, a box of the particular cigarettes which Miss Garbutt favoured. The tobacconist attached no importance to the purchase, though he was interested in Rachel's new appearance.

"Miss Garbutt's usual, Miss?"

"Yes."

Her aunt was reading the morning paper in the garden when Rachel crossed the lawn with her two cartons.

"I have bought you a little present, Auntie."

Miss Garbutt looked, frowned for a second, and then smiled.

"Thank you, my dear. Very kind of you."

"Won't you have one now?"

"I think I will."

Rachel placed the present in her aunt's black lap, and scurried off for matches, her slim legs colourful in new stockings. Miss Garbutt watched the pretty, fluid movements, and the frown returned to her face. That fool Rose had moved just as did the daughter.

But there were other developments. Once a week it had been Eliza's duty to run the clippers over Rachel's hair. Now, they were left unused, and the girl's dark hair began to lengthen. From a boyish crop it became a dusky bush, giving a soft shadow to her hazel eyes and heart-shaped face. Her mirror showed it to her, and gave her mysterious thrills. She liked to toss and shake her head and feel that newly flowing fleece dancing to her destiny. Then, Miss Garbutt hired a car and took her niece to Messrs. Ponts of Westings. Messrs. Ponts, drapers and milliners, were the chic people in the seaside town whose refined young ladies addressed you as "Madam", and in their dress department, yet another confrontation manifested in a coincidence. Mary Lovell happened to be choosing a frock.

Surprised she was, but ready to give Miss Garbutt the credit for being a woman of sense or one who could suffer a change of heart. They smiled upon each other and shook hands and chatted casually for half a minute, Rachel standing by and looking with innocent admiration at Mary Lovell. Meanwhile, the gentlewoman in charge of the department was politely waiting for the conversation to finish.

“ Can I help you, madam ? ”

“ I want to be shown some frocks.”

“ For yourself, madam ? ”

“ No, for my niece.”

Mary Lovell had disappeared into one of the fitting rooms, and with the girl fitter busy about her, and the long mirror confronting her, she was considered this intriguing transformation. Had her husband's devastating clash with Miss Garbutt caused the lady to change so abruptly her cult of repression and of falsification in her niece ? A pretty, loveable creature, certainly, and though emotional conversations at revivalist meetings might be normal, this abrupt reversal was not to be explained with such facility. Miss Garbutt was not the kind of woman to surrender power or property with one swift gesture. Was she planning to retain her grip upon the girl by making life more pleasant for her ?

Mary Lovell chose her frock, and returning to the public gaze, saw Rachel and her lady about to enter a neighbouring cubicle. The saleswoman had two or three pretty pieces draped over an arm.

“ Oh, Rachel ---- ”

“ Yes, Mrs. Lovell ? ”

“ Do you play tennis ? ”

“ No, Mrs. Lovell.”

The doctor's wife turned to Miss Garbutt.

"We have a tennis party on Wednesday, an informal affair. Can Rachel come? I can give her a lesson -- before or afterwards. She'll soon learn."

"Delighted," said Miss Garbutt.

And so "Barker's" was she that she bought her niece a tennis racquet at Mr. Green's Sport Shop by Westing's Pier.

II

Dr. Lovell had a trick of rubbing his right eyebrow with the knuckle of the first finger of his right hand, and the gesture was associated with botherment about a case or any problem that could be elusive, and when he heard from his wife of the incident at Messrs. Ponts, he rubbed that eyebrow. The doctor might be the most humane of men, but his philosophy was edged with benign cynicism. He was no believer in sudden cardiac transformations, and when a woman began to play up to the community, he assumed that she had an ulterior reason for it. Play-actors -- all of us, and there were occasions when Dr. Lovell had to play up to a patient who might be suffering from too much ego and a sense of drama. It was one of his credos that physical deformity of any kind left a scar on what the ancients called a soul, and the moderns a psyche, and equally so could some emotional disharmony leave its mark. Yes, what was Miss Garbutt's game? Whatever it was, Dr. Lovell was inclined to regard it with suspicion.

As to his wife's theory, the charming of Miss Garbutt by the sudden flowering of her niece, Dr. Lovell did not fall for it. The alternative explanation was much more credible. The old ruffian had become wise as to the legal position, and was realising that persuasion would have to

replace compulsion. And yet the doctor was not satisfied. He might diagnose the passion to possess and to repress, without the diagnosis being justified by some of the symptoms. Could a woman who had been capable of crude cruelty devise some more subtle form of sadism ? He wondered.

“ I’ve asked the girl for Wednesday, Frank.”

“ Can she play tennis ? ”

“ Of course not. What chance has she had ? But she will pick it up.”

“ Are we responsible ? ”

“ You dear old lamb, you are the most responsible of us all, and you know it.”

“ I’d like to know what the Garbutt game is. There is something behind all this.”

“ All the more reason for friendly interest. I have taken a great liking to the girl. She needs encouragement and confidence, and a little glamour.”

Dr. Lovell raised his head sharply.

“ Glamour ? Hold on, is the Garbutt woman cultivating glamour ? And if so -- why ? ”

His wife gave him a questioning look.

“ I don’t quite grasp the idea, Frank.”

“ You wouldn’t. It’s not the sort of fish to find on your hook. Who is coming ? ”

“ Oh, comfortable people, and not many. I thought of asking the Apple Man.”

“ Wynter ? ”

“ Yes. I like the straight way he looks at you. And he’s not a sex-pirate.”

"Is any man -- trustworthy, when ---- ?"

"Yes, my dear, you."

Lovell might have indulged in gentle laughter -- even in saluting her faith in him, for the doctor had been a broth of a boy as a medical student, and yet such men can shine as husbands. A physician's honour had to be inviolate, and a pretty face no more than a pretty face, like one of the roses in his garden. Moreover, Frank Lovell loved both his wife and his work, and was too absorbed in both passions to be much bothered by the drift of their casual perfumes. He had sown his wild oats, and now he cultivated roses, and a knowledge of humanity that was all the more comprehensive because he had been wild man.

Lovell himself took the invitation to Wynter. He was passing that way on his morning round and he parked his car by the orchard gate, and stood a moment scrutinizing the trees. They looked pretty scruffy, poor old dears, but the doctor was wise as to country problems. Like old gentlemen who get safely past sixty, they might break into new vitality and take on a fresh fruitfulness. Lovell opened the gate and saw all the brown soil that had been turned up, and in the distance the Apple Man himself tinkering at his motor-cultivator. Wynter was so absorbed in the job, fitting tyres to the tool table, that he neither saw nor heard the doctor's approach.

Lovell had time to take a good and leisurely look at William Wynter. The Apple Man was in shorts and shirt, arms and legs sun browned, his face lean and tanned. A man's hands can be indicative, fumbling or jerkily irritable, but Wynter's hands were deft and deliberate, and there was no slipping of the spanner. Yet, this was a man who had confessed to tumultuous fear, a creature who had been saddled with a neurosis, a scar in his psyche. Rhythm good, intelligent face, intent and serene. The

London's expert's prescription appeared to have been more than adequate.

"Hullo, my lad."

"Hullo, sir. Caught bending -- what?"

"How's the machine functioning?"

"Jolly well. I have got the hang of things."

"New ground turned up."

"Yes, for bush fruit, and new trees."

"The wise man plants trees, the fool fells them. And these old trees were under sentence of death."

Wynter, squatting there, had the look of a man who was fit in body and soul.

"Yes, I know. And they have been reprieved."

The doctor nodded.

"Nature is queer, Wynter. You wouldn't expect her to respond to affection, emotional liquid manure so to speak, and yet I have a feeling that she does."

Wynter put his head back and laughed.

"That's rather a good idea, sir. Like a woman when she is loved."

"Just so. By the way, do you play tennis?"

"I did, but I'm a rabbit."

"Join us on Wednesday if you can spare the time."

"I'd love to, but I haven't a racquet."

"I can lend you one."

"Thanks -- awfully, sir. Would grey flannel trousers matter?"

Lovell grinned at him.

"No. Got shoes?"

"Yes."

“ Well, turn up about four.”

Dr. Lovell went upon his way, but turning at the gate to look back, saw Wynter squatting there absorbed in the job of the moment. Good lad -- this. Hypersensitive -- yes, but tacit and quick in the uptake. And that remark of his, “ Like a woman when she is -- loved.”

Had Wynter ever been in love ? And if so -- how and with that temper ? Romance, the profound tenderness that transcends lust. The doctor closed the gate gently, and thought of those days when, with stranger wonder and exultation he had persuaded Mary to marry him. That was the only loving that was worthwhile, and it seemed out of fashion with the modern nudists.

- 16 -

Wynter bought a second-hand bicycle. Riding down to Harrowfield for tennis at the doctors, and dismounting to walk up Church Hill he was passed by a colourful sports-car driven by a gentleman whose greased black hair suggested an immense oiled wig. A lock of the same hair decorated the driver's forehead, and the colour of the car was brilliantly and appositely red.

When Wynter and his bike arrived at the doctor's house he found the red car parked outside it. He rang the bell, and the maid who answered it, shepherded him through into the garden, and in passing down a passage he heard a voluminous and throaty voice smothering Dr. Lovell's softer tones. Some patient -- this ! And then William Wynter saw a little group of figures under the great pear tree, Mrs. Lovell, an elderly couple, and a girl. The girl was in a short white frock and stockings. Rachel Waters ! Yet another transformation !

Wynter joined them, and was introduced to the elderly pair, a brother and sister from a neighbouring village.

"You and Rachel know each other."

Rachel and William exchanged smiles.

"My husband will be here in a minute or two, and we'll make up a four."

"I'm afraid I'm a rabbit, Mrs. Lovell."

"Well, we are none of us very terrifying. I wonder why Frank isn't here ? "

"I think he has a patient," said Wynter.

"Has he ? Well, we had better start. Will you partner Miss Mason, Mr. Wynter. Mr. Mason, you and I will take them on."

Wynter looked vaguely embarrassed.

"I'm awfully sorry, but the doctor said he could lend me a racquet."

"Of course. There is one on the seat. You won't mind watching the first set, Rachel?"

"I'd like to watch."

"Come alone then -- all of us."

The grass court with its stop sitting lay beyond the rose garden, with a hammock-bed and chair for the spectators. Wynter had put himself beside Rachel as they passed through the flower borders. She was all profile to him, and consciously mute, and Wynter found her shy aloofness alluring.

"Do you play much tennis?"

"No. I have never played tennis."

"Well, I'm not much good. Is that a new racquet?"

"Yes."

"I shall have to get one. Did you buy that in Harrowfield?"

"No, Westings."

And with such casual and conscious commonplaces they arrived at the court and the chairs.

Meanwhile the doctor tarried. When a man dislikes another man and yet has to make conversation, he may look anywhere to save into the other fellow's face, and Dr. Lovell was looking everywhere save at Mr. Emlyn Griffiths, M.P. Why did not the fellow clear out? He needed no more surgical service, and the rather noisome exhibition was over. But Mr. Emlyn Griffiths lingered, and became familiar and jocund, perhaps because he sensed the doctor's antipathy and was challenged by it, for Mr. Griffiths was no fool, and had as glib and spiteful a tongue as any professor of politics. He had the reputation at Westminster of being

insolently and offensively witty, and his manners could be those of an educated lout who was handing out no snob-stuff to any man. It was quite obvious to Mr. Griffiths that the doctor wanted to be rid of him, as did many other people in a world that was not yet all whale-oil and blather.

“ You will have to excuse me, Mr. Griffiths. I have a tennis party.”

Which was obvious from the doctor's flannels. He held the door open and looked past Mr. Griffiths at his bookcase, and on the Welshman's large and sallow face appeared a sardonic smirk. The gentlemen on the other side of the House were familiar with that impudent facial smear.

“ Ah, tennis ! The game always intrigues me, doctor. Wimbledon, the new Holy of Holies of the bourgeoisie. I'll join you as a spectator.”

Lovell gave him a sharp stare.

“ I'm afraid it will bore you.”

“ I am never bored, doctor.”

Damn the fellow ! He could hardly open his mouth without uttering the words -- “ Capitalist ” -- or “ The Middle Classes ”, and reminding his listeners that he had been a “ Worker ” and was the prophet of the Workers' Paradise that was to be. Lovell walked out of the room before his patient, and his unfriendly back would have chastened most men, but it was otherwise with Mr. Emlyn Griffiths. Still making conversation he followed the doctor down the passage to the garden door.

“ I hear you grow roses, doctor. Dogs and daffodils are an English obsession, sacred to -- suburbia.”

Lovell reacted.

“ I have always understood that miners are great dog fanciers.”

“ And why not ? ”

“ Yes, why not ? ”

They were crossing the lawn, and Lovell gave a cursory glance at the large and colourful figure which waddled beside him. Amber velveteen trousers, a grass green shirt, sandals, and feet that slithered along at an acute angle, oiled black hair, and that forelock topping an arrogant and soapy face. What would Mary and the Masons, and Augustus Roper and William Wynter make of this exhibitionist? And Rachel Waters? Well, there would be no contacts between Mr. Emlyn and Miss Garbutt's niece.

They arrived at the court to find a solitary girl in a white frock, and a four hard at it. Mrs. Mary glimpsed the stranger and foozled a shot. What -- had -- Frank found in the village pond? All four players appeared to suffer from a temporary lack of concentration. Nor did Dr. Lovell make any attempt to introduce Mr. Emlyn Griffiths to any of the party, not even his wife. He sat down, beside Rachel Waters, leaving the Welshman standing.

"Had a game yet, Rachel?"

"Not yet. Mrs. Lovell says she will give me a lesson later on."

Rachel's eyes were looking up and past the doctor and Emlyn Griffiths. What a strange and decorative man! Her large eyes were full of naïve curiosity, and an innocent and virginal childishness, and Mr. Emlyn Griffiths, meeting that gaze, moved round and took the empty chair on the other side of her.

"So milady doesn't play tennis."

He could produce a pomarded playfulness, and put into his voice a musical suavity.

"No, not yet."

"Is it necessary?"

The doctor, suddenly alert, and secretly offended, intervened with

caustic briskness. How dared this pornographic and illustrious cad gate-crash a party, and then sit down to play the seductive stranger to this shy girl.

"Quite necessary. Games are -- to the English. Ever play football, Mr. Griffiths?"

"Meaning you did, doc."

"I did. Keeps you fit, and prevents adiposity."

Was this little, limping village medico meaning to be rude? Mr. Griffiths pouted, a habit of his, and his eyes narrowed.

"There are other varieties of adiposity, doctor. The English brand. Manifests in the brain."

The girl was watching the two faces, turning her dark head this way and that, aware of the tension and raised temperature, and puzzled by the sudden fierceness of Dr. Lovell's blue eyes. He appeared to be about to make some retort, and refrained, and at that moment the set ended, and the players moved off the court.

Dr. Lovell rose, Mr. Griffiths did not, but turned again to the girl beside him.

"Let's do introductions. I -- am Emlyn Griffiths."

She looked at him, puzzled and unsmiling, and even to Mr. Griffiths it was obvious that his name meant nothing to her. Meanwhile, Dr. Lovell, having performed the courtesies, drew his wife aside.

"Can you get rid of this fellow, Mary. I've tried, but his skin's too thick ----"

Mrs. Lovell glancing at the girl and the man, found her inspiration.

"Rachel, dear."

Rachel rose and joined her, and Mary Lovell, linking her arm in Rachel's

whispered to her husband -- " Tea. Bring others along, and give them -- a wink -- Frank." Her husband grinned at her, gave the Mason pair and Wynter another grin, glanced for a moment at the seated celebrity, and waved a hand towards the house. Mrs. Mary and Rachel were leading the way, and the rest of the party sized up the situation. Mr. Emlyn Griffiths was left seated, and confronting an empty tennis court.

The interference was as obvious as the girl's negative reaction to his name. Snobs ! He turned to glance over a green shoulder and saw the doctor watching him from the garden doorway like a dog observing some balked trespasser. No tea for little Emlyn. And yet another figure joined the doctor's, Mr. Augustus Roper in tennis kit, for Mr. Roper could still play the game.

" Who is your forlorn friend, Lovell ? "

" Don't you know him ? "

" By Jove, yes, the wordy Welshman."

" He tried to gate-crash us. Let's get in before he tries another -- crash."

But they saw no more of Mr. Emlyn Griffiths. He found his way out by the stable yard, and crossing the High Street, strolled into the " George ". He had come to know that the " George " possessed three houris, but Mr. Griffiths' luck was out. He found himself confronted by Mr. Merry, and Mr. Merry had a particular dislike both for Mr. Giffith's person and his politics.

" Any tea to be had ? "

" In the lounge."

And it was Mrs. Merry who served the great man, and not one of his pretty daughters.

II

Mrs. Mary believed in a sit-down tea, and Wynter found himself next to Rachel Waters. Was this chance or design? Mr. Augustus Roper, occupying the place of honour, observed these two young things with benign and humorous eyes, for a mute and mutual shyness had descended upon William and Rachel. They reminded Mr. Roper of a picture by one of the Pre-Raphaelists, Isabella and her lover, and the Pot of Basil. Yes, a young man might lose his head in other ways than by the butcher's axe, but William Wynter appeared to be lost in unexplainable self-effacement. He had made an ass of himself at tennis, and had discovered Mr. Emlyn Griffiths observing him with an impudent interest that had made him go hot about the ears. And it was his duty to try and make conversation for the benefit of Rachel, but after one glance at her serious profile he could think of nothing to say to her.

As if it mattered! Mr. Roper had plenty to say, and so had Miss Mason, who possessed a dry and pleasant humour, and if youth appeared to be sunk in silence such shyness was not abnormal. Mrs. Mary was watching them with maternal and benign interest, knowing that when young things discover some sort of mysterious allure in each other they may fall into self-conscious dumbness. And she approved of such dumbness so far as William Wynter was concerned. Had he talked cockily and for effect he would have supplied no antidote to Mr. Emlyn Griffiths' straddling swagger.

Mr. Griffiths -- meanwhile -- was taking tea at a lounge window, and watching his car and the doctor's house, and supposing that the snobs who had snubbed him, were including him in their conversation. Which was not so. He had been excluded and his name was not mentioned. But he had asked

Mrs. Merry one evidential question, and received an unhelpful answer.

“ Just been to the doctor’s tennis party. I suppose you know all the locals, darling ? ”

Darling -- indeed ! Mrs. Merry had given him the look she reserved for coruscating cads.

“ I may.”

“ A desiccated brother and sister, and an awkward young guy, and a pretty flapper, and ---- ”

But Mrs. Merry might not have heard him. She turned an abrupt back and walked for the door. Yes, Mr. Griffiths might be interested in pretty flappers, but why should such a nasty piece of work be accorded any information ? And just who was the pretty flapper ?

- 17 -

Dr. Lovell was called to a case -- the Masons were due to dine out and the party languished, but not unhappily so. Mrs. Lovell made the suggestion that Wynter and Rachel should stay on for half an hour, and that Mr. Wynter should give Miss Waters her first lawn-tennis lesson.

William Wynter responded with a smile that could rightly be described as whimsical.

"If a rabbit could teach anybody -- anything, and Rachel doesn't mind ---- "

Miss Waters was as self-effacing as her prospective tutor.

"I'm afraid I shall be an awful idiot."

Mr. Augustus Roper, who was standing by, and secretly chuckling over youth's humility and enjoying it, confessed that he had letters to write, which translated into realism, signified that he was going home to a hot bath and a change of clothes. Men in the sixties and of such ruddy texture as Mr. Roper perspired freely, and the lumbago was not an idle threat in Mr. Roper's case. Mrs. Mary strolled off with him, leaving the shy couple six tennis balls and a free court.

William offered Rachel the balls on his racquet.

"You begin serving."

"No, please, you."

"Must make a beginning, you know."

She smiled and was consenting, and moved towards the side of the court which would send the evening sun slanting upon her face.

"No, I'll take that side. You'd have the sun."

Obediently she changed her direction, looking as solemn about it as

though preparing to share with the man -- and considerate man -- some grave ritual.

Mary Lovell, having said goodbye to Mr. Roper, and listened for a minute to a soft-pedalled six o'clock News, lit a cigarette, and tried to put the Continental crisis out of her thoughts. Why must men make such a squalid mess of things? Would it not be something of a useful innovation if a committee of experienced housewives was put in charge of the world for the next fifty years, and any incipient Hitler, or Emlyn Griffiths for that matter, laid like any arrogant urchin across Matrina's knee and well and truly spanked? Mary Lovell wandered back into the garden, for in such a place and at such an hour you might find peace, with the evening sunlight on old red roofs, and the grey church towers, and the great elms, and upon her husband's flowers. Men who loved flowers would not make war, save upon pests and diseases. And what pity that you could not spray human greenfly with nicotine, pests who sucked the sap from the Rosa Mundi! Then, Mrs. Mary heard laughter and voices, her eyes laughed with them. Those two seemed to be playing themselves out of their shyness.

She strolled towards the court, and herself unseen behind a thicket of dahlias, watched William and Rachel. Wynter was lobbing balls over the net, and Rachel was running to and fro and scooping them back with more success than might have been expected. Wild shots landed here, there and everywhere, but the girl's movements were pretty to watch.

"Look out. I am going to give you a fast one."

Rachel smote at it, and the ball soared irresponsibly over the step netting into a herbaceous border, and both of them laughed like children.

"I'll find it."

But they both went in search of the lost ball, poking about carefully

with their racquets, and twittering like sparrows.

Mrs. Mary blew smoke softly from smiling lips. Her experiment appeared to be pleasantly successful. It took the pair of them some time to find the lost ball, and it was Rachel who discovered it lodged in a clump of purple phlox.

"Here it is."

"Good. We haven't done any damage."

"No," and Rachel gave the phlox a caress, and put her face to it.

Wynter had stood watching her, and this tenderness towards beauty touched him, even as it touched Mary Lovell.

The church clock chimed out and struck seven, and Mary Lovell came out into the open.

"Well, how did you get on, Rachel?"

Wynter answered for her.

"Plenty of dash and foot-work. But, I say, it's seven o'clock. Shall I slacken the net? We haven't lost any balls."

"Yes, please, Mr. Wynter."

He gave her a happy grin.

"Can I be William, or -- Bill?"

"You may. And will you see Rachel home?"

"I will."

The girl put up her face to be kissed, and Mary Lovell gave her no perfunctory peck.

"I hope you have been happy, dear?"

"Very."

She saw them to the white door. Wynter had left his bicycle just inside the railings. Mr. Emlyn Griffiths' red car had gone, nor was he in the

thoughts of any of the three of them.

“ Goodbye,” and she added -- “ my dears.”

Wynter, taking the curb, and wheeling his bike with his right hand on the handle-bar, glanced at the girl beside him.

“ What a lovely person. Yes, both of them.”

II

Miss Kate Garbutt was seated at her bedroom window. It commanded some fifty yards of the road, and the green gate in the formal fence. A half drawn curtain screened the lady, and as a gazebo the window was excellent. The hedge of “ Mon Repos ” had received a stringent trimming, and Miss Garbutt could see the heads and shoulders of William and Rachel. Oh, that young man ! Miss Garbutt screwed up her face. The apple lad. And what sort of man was Mr. William Wynter ? Was he properly cast for the part of the promiscuous Juan ? Miss Garbutt saw them come to the gate, and linger for half a minute.

“ I wonder if you would come and see my orchard, one day -- Rachel ? May I call you Rachel ? ”

She gave him a *douce* look and nodded.

“ I'll have a tea party, and ask Mrs. Lovell.”

Miss Garbutt could not catch what they said to each other, and so missed the nice correctness of William Wynter's invitation, but her concentrated stare penetrated to his consciousness, and he glanced up suddenly and saw her. He had been smiling, but the smile died away, and Rachel, catching the direction of his glance, looked up and saw the face at the window.

Then a gesture from Miss Garbutt astonished both of them. She nodded and

waved a hand, and Wynter, who had no hat to raise, gave her a semi-military salute.

“ Good night, Rachel.”

He saw her scared and bothered face, and felt himself nearer to her than he had been when searching for a lost tennis-ball.

“ Good night, Mr. Wynter.”

She fled, and the gate clanged to after her, and Wynter, glancing up again at the window, saw that Miss Garbutt’s face had disappeared. He mounted his bike, and free-wheeling down the hill, was moved to more than compassion by Rachel’s frightened little face.

Miss Garbutt had descended the stairs, and was in the hall when Rachel opened the door. Her spectacles glimmered, and her large face loomed into a smile.

“ Well, my dear, enjoyed yourself ? ”

“ Yes, Aunt Kate.”

“ Was Mr. Wynter one of the party ? ”

“ Yes, Aunt Kate.”

“ Quite a gentlemanly looking young man.”

“ Yes, Aunt Kate.”

After supper that evening, a somewhat silent meal so far as a distrait Rachel was concerned, Miss Garbutt visited the kitchen, to find Eliza washing up. Miss Garbutt closed the door, stood for a moment with a listening look, and then with lowered voice asked Eliza a question.

“ Oh, Eliza, you may hear more than I do about people. Do you know anything about the young man who bought Carter’s orchard ? ”

Miss Bumpus, drying a plate, gave her mistress a beady look.

“ You mean that Wynter chap ? ”

"Yes."

Eliza sniffed.

"Only -- that he's always hanging about the 'George'. Them there Merry girls -- I reckon."

"I see. Is that just gossip?"

"I don't gossip. It's gospel truth. I guess he's a loose sort of lad."

Miss Garbutt nodded solemnly.

"Thank you, Eliza. A young man's character is so important. I may have to consider -- my niece."

"Yes, m'm, if I were you I wouldn't 'ave that fellow 'anging around too much."

"Exactly my feeling about it, Eliza. Thank you for being frank with me."

III

Wynter put his bicycle away, wandered into the cottage and out again, for there was an emptiness about the cottage which did not meet his mood. Sunset, little fleecy clouds flushed rose-pink, slanting sunlight on the trees, the green sward strangely glamorous. Not a leaf or a grass-blade moving, a silence that was supreme. And Wynter wandered amid his trees, scanning the sparse apples, and seeing them as though they were mysteriously new to him. Some of these trees were nameless, and their names might have died with old Carter. Bramley and Blenheim, and Keswick Codlin he knew, and to the anonymous fruit he had given fancied names of his own. The big red apple with the flattened crown he had christened Orchard Juno, the little pippin with the flush upon its glossy skin -- Orchard Sweeting. A tawny russet with a maroon patch on its sunny side

had -- thanks to the text book -- piqued him into naming it " Roman Russet ". They were so few -- these apples -- and yet their distinctive features were sufficient for his fancy, and as he looked at " Orchard Sweeting " it made him conscious of a girl named Rachel.

But she was only a kid. Was he becoming sentimental about a flapper who had suddenly come into flower and in a rather astonishing way, almost with the rich swiftness of some southern child ? And what lay behind her transformation ? A few weeks ago she was weeping in a derelict privy, a poor little slattern who looked scared if you spoke to her, and now she was sweetly frocked and permitted to play tennis. Yes, and her hair was ceasing to be that of a boy's. Wynter sat down on the trunk of a dead tree which was waiting for the cross-cut, and surmised that there were pieces missing in this jig-saw puzzle, and that they might be concealed in that black old gorgon's pocket. Was Miss Garbutt tired of youth about the house, and proposing to push Rachel into maternity, and get her married and off her hands ? But surely this would be a little premature. The girl could not be of legal age for the mysteries of marriage.

Sex ? Wynter smiled a queer little smile which was mixed up with a frown. There had been times in the past when sex had tormented and humiliated him, but this life on the land had become strangely celibate and tranquil. Was it due to hard labour and the absence of provocation ? He could remember a Frenchman, a veteran of the Great War, confessing to him that after months in the trenches you almost forgot about women. Not that such sexlessness was universal. Some men were plagued by starved desire ; in others it became dormant.

Wynter got up and wandered. What a strange mystery was sex ! Rachel Waters attracted him, her shyness, her obvious innocence, the memory of

her weeping, but there was no crude lust in him towards her. He felt tender towards her, and protective. Hurt such a creature -- he could not.

Wynter was passing back towards the cottage when he heard a soft thud, a sound which was to become familiar to him, an apple falling and striking the turf. It had dropped from the tree which he had christened " Orchard Sweeting ", and as he picked it up he saw the black hole and foul scruff of the Codlin Moth. That was why the apple had fallen before its time. But he slipped it into his pocket, meaning to cut it open and see if the pips were browned, and to try its flavour -- nor did this worm-eaten apple associate itself with Rachel Waters.

IV

Candle-Light, a mirror and a girl. But why candles when her room possessed electric light ? Just fantasy. Rachel had seen some old picture of a Georgian beauty seated at her dressing-table with candles in the sconces, and she had bought two candles and set them into two brass sticks which had decorated her mantelpiece. With her face cupped in her hands she looked at her reflection in the mirror. Yes, her hair had grown into a soft black bob, and no longer was her forehead like a boy's. She was serious, smileless, gazing with that questioning curiosity which -- at times -- transfixes youth.

" Is that -- me ? What manner of thing am I ? Am I good to look at ? And why has she grown kind ? "

That question remained unanswerable, nor could a week or two of complaisance efface years of fear and of suppression. Rachel might find happiness and wonder in her sudden new self, but the old Rachel looked out

of the same eyes like some frightened and suspicious creature hiding in a thicket. What had happened in her world and to Aunt Kate ? Had there been some scene between Dr. Lovell and her aunt, and had the doctor's intervention compelled Miss Garbutt to treat her so differently ?

Turning from her mirror to glance at those two photos over her mantlepice, her mother and her father -- " Fool " and " Scoundrel ", she was moved by an impulse that projected a testing purpose. It had been her aunt's custom to inspect her bedroom daily, and taking down those two sinister relics, she put them away in a drawer. Would Aunt Kate notice the change, and comment upon it, and perhaps insist upon the replacement of the pictures ?

For two days Rachel waited for a storm to break, but her Aunt's face remained complacent. Miss Kate Garbutt, if she continued to visit her niece's room, refrained from mentioning the absence of those two portraits.

- 18 -

Munich and Wynter's realisation during those tense and poignant days, that his psychic scar and the Spanish War had left him a physical coward.

If war came -- he -- a man in the early thirties would be classed for service, and he had neither the heart nor the stomach for more bombs. Miserable funk ! But were not all men -- save a few fools and irresponsibles -- cowards in the face of modern horrors ? There was no glamour or glory in high-explosive and poison gas. Even the colour had gone out of it ; creatures of brown and grey crawled in masses or hid in slits in the soil.

If war came, how could he escape it, or elude it ? And over his cottage door he might have hung the text -- " No Hero This." And for one whole day he was restless yet idle, mooching about among his trees, ashamed and yet knowing that at the second attempt he would make no soldier. He had a small wireless set, and whenever news might be expected he went in and turned it on, and sat rigid -- listening.

Rumour had it that trenches were being dug in London, and anti-aircraft guns installed in the parks. Oh, damn Hitler and power-politics ! Would Chamberlain produce peace ? And what kind of peace would it be ? Wynter would go out and look at his trees, and somehow feel that they were protective friends, and yet ---- if only they were carrying a crop that would justify his cowardice !

On the most tense morning of all an inspiration came to him, even though it had the wings of fear. He got out the motor-cultivator with plough attachment, and began to tear up the turf between the trees at the lower end of the orchard. It was no very workmanlike job, but fierce action with

a prospective purpose, a plan to cheat the other form of action which he feared.

Dr. Lovell, passing that way, and hag-ridden by memories of his war -- the butchery on the Somme and at Ypres, pulled up by the orchard gate. He, too, was full of poignant disquiet, for though any second war would not claim him on active service, the very smell of the old war seemed to be in his nostrils. Faugh, mud and filth and blood, sodden messes on stretchers, corpses in shell-holes, boredom alternating with fear. He left his car and saw Wynter at the stilts of his machine tearing up turf, and swinging the cultivator round with a kind of urgent haste at the end of each traverse, and somehow Lovell understood. Had he not felt the same urge to drive the physical part of him into fierce activity, to get hold of something with his hands, to tear forebodings to tatters by doing something intensively real? He stood a moment watching the figure between the stilts of the rattling, detonating machine, and guessed that Wynter felt as he did.

Lovell opened the gate and walked down between the trees. Oh, blessed trees, serene and old and stately! Why could not man be content with simple things, seed sowing and harvest, sea, sky, hills and woods, and the sweet rhythm of nature? Had not cities and crowds become the doom and the curse of man? Too many people, blind masses of humanity that became the explosive sport of those who craved for power. Wynter was swinging the cultivator round at the far end of the orchard when he sighted the doctor, and he threw out the clutch, and throttled back the engine, and remained waiting between the stilts, suddenly still and rigid. He, too, craved for human contact, and yet feared it.

"Hullo, my lad -- hard at it."

They stood and looked at each other, smileless and consideringly.

Wynter's face was wet with sweat.

"Must do -- something."

Lovell nodded, but his eyes saw more than man driven to spend himself in toil and sweat. Wynter had wind up. His face was the face of a man just before zero hour and the promise of a sticky show.

"More food, what. Good idea."

Wynter's hands relaxed. His shoulders seemed to snag, and almost his eyes were furtive.

"Any more news, sir ? "

"Nothing definite. I can't say I like the feel of things."

"You mean, war is certain ? "

"No, but this rushing over there to lick Hitler's boots."

"Do you see it that way ? "

"I'm afraid I do."

"But if it means peace, sir ? "

"A purchased peace ? This country has the wind up, and I don't like it."

Wynter was looking anywhere but at the doctor, for he felt himself to be included in this condemnation, and yet his shame was unashamed. He knew what modern war could be, and this German war would be infinitely more terrible, and Lovell, observing him with kind and compassionate eyes, felt for his cigarette case, flicked it open, and held it out to Wynter.

"Well, Bill, you wouldn't be involved."

"I, sir ? "

Wynter's fingers fumbled as he picked at a cigarette.

"No. Not after -- that other business of yours. Besides, you would be on food production."

Wynter's eyes still avoided the other man's.

“ One might feel rather rotten about it.”

“ Why -- if you are sweating your soul out on the land ? As I see it, we may be very near starvation. We were in 1917.”

The doctor resumed his round and Wynter, his tearing up of old rough turf, though the job was more of an outlet for nervous tension than a practical proposition. Deeper ploughing would be needed, and the motor-cultivator had not the power for deep cultivation. Well, he might hire the job done for him. Meanwhile, all this old turf would have to be stacked for rotting down and future use. He would double his order for bush fruit, and include logan and raspberries.

A labourer passing on a bike dismounted to watch this toff at work. What did he think he was doing ? And later that evening, the man met old Tom and others in a pub, and an argument developed. Harrowfield sneered.

“ Don't the fool know you can't get a crop off first year bushes and canes ? ”

Old Tom was caustic.

“ He be'n't the fool you think he be.”

“ And how's he going to sell the stuff, if he ever gets it ? ”

“ Wait and see,” said old Tom, “ if this 'ere war comes.”

“ Caw, tere ain't going to be no war.”

So said the local know-alls, and when that hysterical reprieve sent a jittery crowd cheering an old gentleman in Downing Street, Tom Lavender was the first person to bring the news to Carter's Orchard. Tom was not liking it whole-heartedly, even as Dr. Lovell disliked it, and he did not crow as London was crowing.

“ It's been put off, ssir.”

Wynter -- like London -- was shamefully exultant, but he did not say so

to old Tom.

II

Harrowfield did celebrate in its own personal and particular way, for countrymen remain persons, and not index cards filed in a drawer. The "George" was crowded, and in the holy of holies the drinks were on the house. B. Co. of the local Territorials, fresh from a week's camp, held a parade on the Green, and when the men had been dismissed, their two officers adjourned to the "George". Mr. Roper, who had allowed himself an extra glass of sherry, having watched from a window, was suddenly aware of himself as a lonely old man. He too had been depressed by "Munich", and remembering the men who had paraded for that other war, wondered how long their sons would be reprieved.

Wynter was on his way to Harrowfield. Now that the crisis had been conjured away, he was remembering the party he had proposed to give, and it too might be regarded as a celebration. He took the path past the garden of "Mon Repos", and as he neared the gate he heard someone singing softly and to herself, and the song was from "Bitter-Sweet". Rachel? Who else could it be? And for a second or two the sound was charmingly incongruous, music instead of tears, the gawky child so swiftly transformed into woman.

He tried the gate and found it unlocked, and opening it for a couple of inches, he caught a glimpse of her idling up a turfed path. Her very movements were different, *douce* and consciously mature, one hand on a hip, and the lilt of her idling suggesting a naïve swagger. How many years had passed since he had felt like that, youth full of itself with a sensitive

and sensuous self-consciousness ?

He opened the gate another two inches so as to keep her in view, and then he was moved to a playfulness that was more significant than he knew.

“ Rachel.”

She swung around swiftly, and with the turn of her head her lengthening fleece seemed to ripple. Infinite seriousness, and then -- eyes and lips alive. She came slowly down the path towards him, and there was no flinching shyness in her little face.

“ It’s you.”

How obvious and yet how subtle !

“ I’m giving a party, Rachel. Will you come ? ”

She looked at him steadfastly, like a creature conscious of some inevitable emotion.

“ Yes -- Bill.”

“ Splendid. I’m just going up to ask the doctor and Mrs. Lovell. Shall we say Wednesday ? ”

She nodded.

“ Ought I to ask your aunt ? ”

“ To the party ? ”

“ Well, no, for her gracious favour.”

“ I’ll ask her.”

“ Tell her you will be with the Lovells.”

“ Yes, Bill.”

“ I’ll be getting on now to see them.”

He smiled at her, closed the gate, and then opened it again on impulse. She was still standing there, her eyes strangely serious.

“ Goodbye till Wednesday, Rachel. I just wanted to have another look.”

He closed the gate again, and when he had gone she walked slowly to the gate, and resting her forehead against it, put both hands to her bosom.

A somewhat merry group was advertising its feelings of relief outside the "George", and a part of it was Merry. Jean and Millicent were giving it a comely and feminine flavour, and Miss Millicent, who was prettily flushed and excited, waved to William Wynter.

"Oh, Bill, come and have one."

How could a gentleman refuse so spontaneous a challenge, nor could a little drink on particular occasions do a man any harm. So, Wynter followed Millicent into the Holy of Holies, to find himself face to face with the two Territorial officers in khaki, plus Mr. Merry and his Wife, nor did he feel the atmosphere to be unimpeachably merry in this rather dark little room.

"Come in, Mr. Wynter. What will you have? A sherry?"

"Thank you."

Mr. Merry, being a John Bull of a man, Georgian in temper, was not liking this unseemly haste in propitiating a ruddy German.

"Well, what do you think of it, sir? You've had some experience."

Wynter hesitated, and met the eyes of the man in khaki who was nearest to him. Captain Richards came from one of the great houses in the neighbourhood, a dark, intense, serious young man, handsome, yet not too conscious of it.

His eyes troubled Wynter.

"Well, it gives us time, Mr. Merry."

"I don't like it, Mr. Wynter."

He handed a glass of sherry to his guest, and Wynter was raising the glass when the dark young man spoke to him.

"Is it true, Mr. Wynter, that you served in Spain?"

"Yes, for a few months."

"Well, you are just the man we need. We are short of officers. Why not join us?"

Wynter drank, and drank too quickly, and the wine produced a spasm and a cough. He spluttered, and was very conscious of the eyes of the other man's fixed upon him consideringly. He felt both a fool and a frightened fool.

"Afraid I was only a humble private."

"That wouldn't matter."

"And -- er -- I'm not fit -- now."

Those dark eyes still observed him with disconcerting directness.

"Wounded?"

"Buried by a bomb. I was in hospital -- for months."

Captain Richards nodded and to Wynter there was critical comprehension in that curt nod. A fellow who had been shell-shocked and lost his nerve. Captain Richards turned to his junior officer.

"Time we were going. I can give you a lift, Jack. Thanks, Mrs. Merry. Goodnight everybody."

He did not look again at Wynter, but in the doorway he turned and saluted them all with grave dignity, and Wynter had the feeling that he had been summed up and dismissed. Mr. Merry followed the two officers out, and Wynter, left alone with the two women, drank off his sherry with self-conscious haste.

"Thanks, Mrs. Merry, thanks -- Millicent. I am due at the doctor's. Er -- goodnight."

He got himself out of the room, only to find Mr. Merry and the two men in uniform in the hotel doorway, and he more than suspected that they had

been discussing him. He blurted an "Excuse me", and they made way for him in what felt to be unfriendly silence.

Mrs. Merry and her daughter were looking at each other.

"Poor lad, he wouldn't be much use."

Millicent was silent.

III

Wynter crossed the road diagonally towards the doctor's house and with such lack of attention to his surroundings that an approaching car hooted venomously and the driver had to break hard, and Wynter, teetering on his toes, had a glimpse of an angry face.

"Want to get killed, you fool?" said the face, and Wynter, back on his balance and his heels, gave the face of a shamed grin.

"Sorry."

"All right. Thank my brakes," and the car accelerated and drove on.

A couple of louts confronted Wynter on the opposite pavement, also grinning, lads whose lower lips lapsed over their chins. Their mocking faces added to his self-shame, as did the comments which followed his too sensitive back. He had had more than he could carry in the "George". Yes, he had, poor mutt, and when he reached the Lovell gate his self-control spluttered as it had done over the sherry. He swung round, caught the two louts watching him, and was whipped back with shamed anger into the completion of his purpose. He rang the doctor's bell, and standing with his back to the door, confronted Harrowfield High Street like a man who had just been released from the pillory.

"Yes, sir?" said a voice.

Wynter turned sharply.

“ Is the doctor in ? ”

“ No, he is out at the moment, sir.”

“ Is Mrs. Lovell in ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Will you ask her if I can see her. My name is Wynter.”

“ I think she’s in the garden. Will you come in, sir.”

Mary Lovell was pottering as some women love to do, cutting off dead flowers, and removing too impudent weeds which had failed to catch the gardener’s eye. “ Mr. Wynter, Ethel. Oh, yes, ask him to come out here,” and Wynter, released into that tranquil acre, suddenly felt soothed, and not like a frightened cur to be kicked by any casual boot.

Mary Lovell was waist deep in a herbaceous border, a stick-basket beside her, and at the moment she was freeing a sheaf of tall asters from the waist-belt of twine the gardener had applied to them. Yes, a gracious act, and performed with a twinkle of humour, and William Wynter’s self-consciousness was soothed and loosened.

Said Mrs. Mary, “ Hallo, William. I wonder why gardeners love to rope things up as though they were good old spinsters ? ”

Wynter’s face had lost its starkness.

“ Just don’t see or think.”

“ Throw a rope round the middle, put your foot against the victim and haul hard. No feeling for a lady’s figure.”

This time Wynter laughed.

“ Perhaps it’s the Victorian mind. Gardeners may not approve of short loose frocks. I’m having a party on Wednesday. I wonder if you and the doctor could come ? ”

“ I’d love to, and Frank will if he can. I have never seen inside of your cottage.”

“ It’s rather bachelor, I’m afraid, but it can manage tea. I have asked Rachel. Could she come with you ? ”

Mary Lovell gave him a mother look.

“ Yes, William, she can.”

“ Thank you so much.”

Neither of them mentioned “ Munich ”, though it was very much in the minds of both, and Wynter, in making his way out of the house, met the doctor at the gate.

“ Hullo, Bill.”

“ Hullo, sir. I have just been asking Mrs. Lovell if you could come to tea on Wednesday. She said yes for herself. Perhaps you ---- ”

“ I dare say I can manage it.”

“ I’ve asked Rachel. Mrs. Lovell says that she can come with you.”

The doctor gave a quick, shrewd smile.

“ With pleasure. Heard the news I suppose ? ”

Wynter’s face went stiff.

“ Yes. Nasty business whichever way you look at it. I have had an invitation to join the local Territorials.”

Lovell was not blind to Wynter’s change of face.

“ Not for you, Bill.”

“ I don’t know, sir. It made me feel a filthy worm.”

The doctor essayed a lighter touch.

“ Worms are good in the soil, my lad. No, not irony. You had your bit with that bomb. I don’t think I told you that I have been in touch with your London man. I ought to have told you. He said, ‘ Keep him to his apple

trees.' ”

Wynter smiled a little wincing smile.

“ Your doctors may understand, sir, but ---- ”

“ If there are any butters-in, Bill, I can deal with them. Don't worry.”

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In the modern jargon William Wynter was an "Escapist", in that he preferred the text-book of Nature to the unpleasant manual produced by man. So, were the old eremites, monks and hermits escapists, and especially so those austere but possibly happy souls in the Cistercians, who loved to set their houses in some green valley, and who tilled the soil and were the world's best farmers when War and Kingly adventures were the whole of history.

Had Wynter been accused -- as accused he was to be -- of shedding his responsibilities and his share in adding to the messy martyrdom of man, he might have shown innocent surprise. He could have said -- "Am I wrong because millions of you think yourselves to be right? And because I see and share in what thousands of you never seen, dawns and sunsets, and moonlight in the trees, and frosted grass, and the first buds swelling, and I hear the birds, and I sleep in silence and in peace? My friends are the fruits of the earth, my ideal spot an orchard such as this, not a kind of global garage, or an airfield where flying lorries buzz around like monstrous blow-flies. I watch and labour and learn. I interfere with no man, and would be interfered with by no man. Selfish, am I? Might I not claim it to be a serene selflessness that does not jabber and push and hustle. Old fashioned, yes, but what have all your clattering new fashions given man? A crude materialism, frustration, unrest."

But at the moment William Wynter's innocent obsession was the production of a passable tea. The cottage was to be on show, and the cottage was not always showable, for he had to admit that domestic chores bored him, but he got down to business with brush and duster, cleaned

windows, and swept floors. The little kitchen had its face washed. He pedalled off to Harrowfield, and bought scones and fancy cakes, and extra milk and butter. He set out his Spode china on the gate-legged table, and then discovered the horrid truth -- he had only three chairs. Well, an empty box would have to serve, draped with an odd curtain, and the hard seat would be his. At three o'clock on the Wednesday afternoon he surveyed the scene and found it somewhat good, buttered scones and two dishes of fancy cakes, and half a dozen interested flies !

Damn the beasts ! He swatted them off, and made two kills on the parlour window, and decided to shut the window until his guests arrived, but four persistent flies remained and were joined from somewhere by a vagrant wasp. He took a swipe at the wasp as it hovered over a plate of cakes, missed it and hit the confectionary. Oh, damn ! The dish needed reordering, but he did do the wasp to death on the parlour window. His last inspiration was to spread clean dusters over the food.

Then a quite disconcerting thought shocked him. What if the ladies should want to retire ? An earth bucket in an outside privy ? Had he emptied the bucket ? He had not, and his last act was a dash to improve the sanitation. But there were flies here, and an odour. Not nice, no perfume of sentiment. Almost he scratched his head, and ascending the stairs, put out a certain clean receptacle in his small spare-room which was only partly furnished. Cigarettes -- yes. He had a new packet of cigarettes.

II

Miss Garbutt rustled down the stairs of " Mon Repos ". Actually she had been to inspect her niece in one of her fresh new frocks. She had gargled

approval.

“ Yes, you look quite nice, my dear. I hope you will enjoy yourself.”

And what was in the Garbutt's mind ? That the girl-fool Rose's daughter -- looked ripe for seduction. The Lovells might be a little in the way, or be giving conventional face to what might happen in the future. Catharine Garbutt had been struck by the new Rachel's likeness to her mother, yes, on that disastrous day when she had first been seen by the susceptible Samuel. The same douce movements, the same pretty flush and self-conscious animation, the same ripeness of the lips, and shy allure in the hazel eyes. Miss Garbutt had been shaken by a gust of her old, savage jealousy. The sins of the fathers ---- ? Yes, might they not be visited even more disastrously upon the daughter.

She stood in the doorway of “ Mon Repos ” and waved a hand to Rachel as the girl closed the green gate on her way to the Lovells, and but for the shortness of the skirt and the absence of flounciness the figure might have been that of her mother.

III

William Wynter could not sit still. After all, why should he sit still, and if something in him wanted to walk about and play the fidgety boy, let it. He had the kitchen kettle on, and some fresh flowers on the table, and he was wearing his best lounge suit, a grey flecked with blue, and he had taken trouble with his rather rebellious hair and the correctness of his tie.

He walked up the orchard to the field-gate, and opened it so that Dr. Lovell could drive in and park his car on the grass, and as he swung the

gate back to the post and catch his eyes rested for a moment on the piece of rotting rope which was still attached to the Lyre tree. He had left it there, why -- he could not quite say, but on this particular afternoon that piece of rotting hemp struck him as being incongruous and sinister. He had a knife in his pocket, and he opened the blade and going to the tree, took hold of the end of the rope. The thing came away in his hand, and the knife was not needed, and he was holding that memento of an old man's despair when he heard the car.

Wynter dropped the thing into the grass at the foot of the tree, shut and pocketed the knife, and turned back towards the gate. He was conscious of a curious feeling of suspense, of being strung up on a rope of sentiment. Gosh, was he falling in love with a kid of sixteen? Then he heard the car slowing down, and saw its black shape sliding beyond the hedge, and to him came the quite fantastic fancy of the black barge and the Maid of Astolat lying pale with death within it.

Dr. Lovell, seeing the open gate, drove in.

"Thanks, Bill. Thoughtful of you."

The car was a coupe, and Wynter saw a face at the rear of the window, a girl's face, smiling at him. He waved a hand and went to open the car door. And then he remembered that his first act of courtesy should be to Mary Lovell, and he walked round the back of the car to find the door open and Mrs. Lovell and her husband out on the grass.

"So glad you could come, doctor."

"I made him," said Mrs. Mary.

Rachel had changed seats and was emerging by way of the near door, slim legs leading, and Wynter turned to give her a hand. Their eyes met, but only for a moment.

"The old trees don't look too bad, Bill."

"Arsonate of lead, sir. They came round wonderfully after we had poisoned the caterpillar world."

Mrs. Lovell had linked arms with Rachel.

"What a pity one can't spray poison upon dictators."

"Dangerous precedent, my dear. Like enthusiasm. Dictators may have their uses."

"Oh -- Frank!"

"Well, here's a case in point. Know that new fellow on the petrol pump at Merrit's Garage? Merrit has had to sack him. And why? The fellow refused to sweep out the show-room. Said it was a menial job. And if he was told to post a letter he insisted on changing his overall before going down the street."

"But what a snob!"

"We -- are the snobs, my dear, or we are told so. But the firmest part of the story is that the last time I filled up, the fellow spilled petrol all over the path and the car, and then blamed the pump. He -- couldn't be wrong, of course."

Wynter laughed.

"Is that type ripe for a dictator, sir?"

"What would you say, Bill?"

"Well, some kind of discipline -- anyway."

They had come to the cottage porch, and Mrs. Lovell and Rachel passing in together saw the open doorway of the parlour and tea laid out, and the bright blue of Spode on the dark oak of the table. There was a sudden sheen on Rachel's face. What a pretty, cosy room, and what a lovely china, and in her new approach to beauty the china was more compelling than the cakes.

Wynter, following the doctor, had a glimpse of the girl's face, and saw it as enchantment.

"Please go in. I have the kettle on. I'll make tea."

He passed down the passage behind them to find the kettle blowing off steam, and the lid rattling in protest.

Lovell, who had been called on a grim November morning to view John Carter lying dead in this very room, remembered the distorted and cyanosed face with its blubber lips and staring eyes. A series of spring frosts and England's lack of interest in England's fruit had killed old Carter, and Lovell, looking round the colourful little room, crossed fingers against fate and fortune. Mrs. Mary had sat down comfortably and with an air of finality on a Windsor chair, and Rachel, after throwing quick glances about her, took her camouflaged box which Wynter had intended for himself. She had just perched there when their host arrived with the teapot and hot-water jug.

His instant glance was at Rachel.

"Sorry. I'm sitting there. Chairs are for the ladies."

Dr. Lovell chuckled.

"Enter -- the dictator."

"Ah, no, sir. To my shame I am short of chairs. Rachel, Please -- as a favour."

She rose with a little lilting laugh, and the doctor and his wife exchanged glances.

"Yes, Bill, if you want me to."

"That's it, my dear ; be nice to man when he asks nicely."

Wynter was placing the tea-pot and jug on the tray, and concentrating on spilling neither.

“ Would you pour out, Mr. Lovell ? ”

“ Woman’s job, William.”

“ I’m sure you will do it better than I shall.”

Dr. Lovell sat down in his chair. It occurred to him to wonder whether – if war came in the end -- this island would be deprived of its pet drinks -- beer and tea.

“ Do you take sugar, Rachel ? ”

“ Yes, please.”

Mary Lovell looked for the sugar bowl and found it absent, and Wynter, observing the omission, jumped off his box.

“ Silly ass. So sorry.”

He dived into the kitchen and returned with the sugar.

“ I’m afraid I’m a little sketchy sometimes on the domestic side.”

“ Don’t you get any help, William ? ”

“ No.”

“ Why not Jane Lavender ? ”

“ She’s not very fit.”

“ Well, we will wash up for you. Won’t we, Rachel ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Oh, no, Mrs. Lovell, you won’t. Couldn’t hear of it. A party’s a party.”

Mary Lovell was making inward comments, and watching the two young things whose mutual shyness continued. This was a good lad, sensitive and helpful, strangely guileless in a boyish way, a lad who could look at a girl as at a flower, and not think only of pulling her petals to pieces. And the country world was not guileless when it came to the business of buying and selling, but tough and sly, and enjoying fooling the other fellow. If William grew his fruit, how would he market it to people who were

prepared to pay twopence for produce they sold at a shilling? Would a tough partner in life be of any lasting use to a lad like William Wynter? Mrs. Mary glanced at Rachel. H'm -- no. William might ask for a gentle comeliness, a sensitive surface to match his own, and in defence of his partner he might grow as tough as the natives.

When tea was over Wynter produced cigarettes. Mrs. Mary accepted one; Rachel shook a shy head and smiled.

"I've never smoked one."

"You'll have a pipe, sir."

"I will."

"So will I."

Would they like to look over the cottage and orchard? William had manners. He addressed himself always to Mary Lovell though the pretty creature near him might be the lure. The doctor sat smoking his pipe while the kitchen was inspected, and William Wynter explained that as soon as he could afford it he was going to buy a Calor Gas outfit. Yes, oil stoves were smelly things, and the kitchen grate a wasteful specimen. Rachel, silent and observant, listened and looked, and wondered at it all. Was not man sometimes lonely all by himself with washing-bowl or frying-pan?

"Could you cook, William, before you came here?"

"Not much. Scrambled eggs and Welsh Rarebit. I'm still a bit sketchy."

"Not too much tin opener, I hope?"

He laughed.

"Well, when one's tired I'm afraid one descends to tins."

Returning to the parlour they found it empty. Dr. Lovell had taken his pipe out into the orchard, and they found him there looking with a

professional eye at some of the old trees.

“ Know the name of that one, Bill ? ”

“ No, sir, only that it is a pippin. I’ve christened it ‘ Orchard Sweeting ’.”

He plucked one of the six apples that remained on it, a pretty thing, polished gold flushed with rose, and for a second or two he held it on the palm of his hand. Rachel was close to him, and their eyes met.

“ Try it, Rachel.”

Her slim fingers took it and held it, but she did not put the apple to her lips, and doctor and wife smiled at each other. Orchard Sweeting ! Almost the setting was pure Thomas Hardy.

“ May I take it home, William ? ”

“ Of course.”

“ It’s almost too pretty to eat.”

Mrs. Mary saw the way Wynter looked at her. Yes, just as she felt about the apple. And if a lad was in love he should look at his love in that way.

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Dr. Lovell, left alone in the parlour during the inspection of the kitchen, had looked at the books in Wynter's bookcase, and had been surprised and intrigued by a particular omission. The cottage's minute library consisted chiefly of literature on the land, soil, ecology, simple physiology, agriculture, horticulture, and the art and history of fruit growing, but there was no copy of either of William Wynter's not very successful novels. Now -- why ? Was Wynter not proud of his literary adventure ? Had he shed one craft for another, and come to regard Scriblerus as a poor sort of fellow ? Yet, Lovell could suppose that when a young man had written a book and got it published, he might wish to impress. His case was very different from that of Mr. Emlyn Griffiths whose literary product smirked at you on the tables and shelves of " Red Chimneys ". On the slightest provocation at all, Mr. Emlyn Griffiths would present you with a copy and the suggestion that " Licensed Liberty " was the epoch making work, and a symbol of the new democracy. The doctor had tried to read the book, and in the modern parlance found it sick-making. There was plenty of license in it, but no liberty for those who did not agree with Mr. Griffiths.

In the car on the way home he was moved to ask his wife a question.

" Have you read either of William's books ? "

" Books ? I don't know ---- "

" Yes, William's an author, but doesn't seem to advertise it. I wonder if the local library has a copy."

" I -- must -- try."

Rachel sat silent, secretly thrilled by the discovery. Bill had written

books, and Bill had not boasted about it.

The Lovell car dropped her and Mrs. Mary at the gate of " Mon Repos ", for Mary Lovell was feeling that some belated attention was due to Miss Garbutt after her change of heart. Or, perhaps Mrs. Mary was curious to see how Miss Garbutt and her niece behaved to each other. A matter of atmosphere.

" I'll come in with you for five minutes, my dear."

" Oh, do," said Rachel, and her eagerness was not produced by fear. The afternoon had been lovely. No need to ring bells, nor to creep in like a guilty truant.

Miss Garbutt was in the garden, and Miss Garbutt appeared to be delighted to welcome Mrs. Lovell. And how had the party gone ? Her niece's animated face could answer that question. And would Mrs. Lovell accept a glass of sherry ? Mary Lovell was white silk to Miss Garbutt's black satin, for, when another woman had you guessing it behoved you to play upon to her. And what was the ultimate game ? For, deep in her feminine bones, Mary Lovell felt a profound mistrust of Miss Catharine Garbutt.

" Rachel, dear, you will find the sherry decanter in the sideboard cupboard."

" Yes, aunt."

" And bring three glasses."

So Rachel was to have sherry ! The two ladies faced each other in garden chairs, and Miss Garbutt made conversation.

" An interesting young man, Mr. Wynter."

A question was launched in the assertion.

" Yes, he is an author as well as a fruit-grower."

" Indeed ! "

“ I’m afraid I have not read any of his books. He does not seem to advertise himself.”

“ And does he write under his own name ? ”

“ I believe so.”

Miss Garbutt obtained her books from a Lending Library at Westings and she was assuring herself that she would procure one of Mr. Wynter’s books and sample the author in his prose. The result might be revealing, especially so if Mr. Wynter belonged to the very modern school which appeared to spend most of its life jumping in and out of bed. There was no faerciosity however in her plan to discover a second Samuel Waters in William Wynter.

Rachel, walking like some young priestess carrying with supreme care a vessel of sacred wine, appeared with a silver salver, a decanter, and three glasses, and finding no table for her burden, stooped with the lithe fluidity of youth and deposited the salver at Miss Garbutt’s feet. Her aunt smiled upon her. “ Thank you, my dear,” and Miss Garbutt, bending until her large stomach appeared to rest like a cushion between her knees, filled three glasses, and replacing the decanter on the salver, handed a glass to her guest.

“ Shall we drink to dear good Mr. Chamberlain ? ”

“ I agree.”

Mrs. Mary, holding her glass, watched Miss Garbutt fill the other two. Was Rachel to drink wine ? Was it wise ? Yes, the modern young were cock-tail minded, but was Miss Garbutt proposing to drink some more significant and secret toast ? Was she bored with youth and preparing to get it married and off her hands ? That might be the explanation.

Rachel, tentatively sipping the first wine she had ever tasted, thought

it funny and rather sour stuff, and not like the sweet apple William had picked for her. She had taken one surreptitious bite at it, and then slipped it into a pocket, and it was there to be gazed at and eaten at her leisure. Yet, this yellow liquid did give you a warm flush in your tummy, and a feeling that life and love could be as sweet as William's apple.

Mrs. Mary, having drunk her sherry and engaged in casual and conventional conversation, refused a second glass, and took leave of Miss Garbutt, and Rachel leaving half her wine in the glass, accompanied Mary Lovell to the green gate.

"It's been lovely. Thank you ever so much."

"Don't thank me, my dear."

And Mrs. Mary kissed her, and patting a soft cheek, said, "Keep off little drinks, Rachel. You don't need them."

II

Miss Garbutt, following up the pursuit of William Wynter in literature, was successful, in that the girl librarian was able to rout out a copy of "Silver Linings". It had not been much read, and the girl confessed that she had forgotten they had a copy, and that it had been included in a batch of "Remainders" which the library had purchased cheaply.

"Have you read it?" asked Miss Garbutt.

"Yes, I remember now. Rather tripish."

Miss Garbutt took "Silver Linings" home with her concealed in a shopping bag, and sampled it that evening, and the first surprise arrived on the opening page. The heroine was named Rachel! Well, well, how apposite! The book went to bed with Miss Garbutt, and it provided the

reader with a subtle very modern picture of a pretty piece of seduction, and the victim was " Rachel ". Well, well ! Even Miss Garbutt, the prude could realise that it was cleverly done, and appeared to indicate that Mr. William Wynter might be a literary Samuel.

Yet, she did not arrive at Mr. Wynter's reason for concealing his books, or suppressing them. He was not proud of his rendering of Rachel, and in a panic lest the real Rachel should discover the smell of cheapness. The Spanish war had cured him of such youthful atrocities.

That too was Miss Garbutt's verdict. If possible this piece of fiction must be kept from her niece. She decided to burn the copy, confess to moral indignation, and compensate the library for its loss.

III

At dinner after her glass of sherry at " Mon Repos ", Mary Lovell once more put the problem of Miss Garbutt's change of heart to her husband, and suffered him to digest it, for Lovell was in one of those silent moods. He had had a longish day, and his lame leg was hurting him, as it did from time to time. One of the prime prerogatives of the physician may be to relieve pain, but Frank Lovell, in his own case, eschewed all dope. He was one of those men who would not pander to personal pain, not from fear of creating a habit, but because of a queer Spartan pride.

His wife knew the symptoms, the slight frown, the pinched features, the curious increase in his air of gentleness.

" Better go to bed early, Frank."

" I may be called out."

" I do wish sometimes you would get a young partner."

"Not enough for two. And I shouldn't take to double harness."

She gave him a look of wise affection.

"It seems to have worked with us all right."

He gave her a quick smile.

"Rather different. Sympathetic reactions. I wonder if you are right?"

"About the Garbutt?"

"Yes. It's logical in a way. Having had her run, and knowing that the hare would soon be beyond chasing, she became bored with the game. And yet ----?"

"Well, Frank?"

"I am not quite sure about it. Ominous sort of female."

"What other motive could there be? Wanting the girl off her hands ----"

"Ever noticed her hands? Not hands that would let go easily," and he added with a tired grin, "unless you greased them."

IV

Had Miss Garbutt known that William Wynter was far more concerned about "Silver Linings" than she was, and for reasons of nice sentiment, she might have been less confident about the future. Wynter might hold the Ace of Hearts, but in the ultimate show-down, Miss Garbutt could produce an Ace of Spades. She could either bury romance or the solace of someone's sanity.

Never, perhaps, had an author been in such an absurd hurry to suppress a thing of his own creating. William Wynter knew that Harrowfield possessed no copy of his books, and actually he had stuffed his own two

copies of "Silver Linings" into the kitchen grate. So sensitively concerned was he about the traducing of a Christian name, and his own crude picturing of modern love, that he took a bus to Westings and toured its three libraries, and for an author his relief might have appeared fantastic when he discovered that as an author he did not exist. The young lady at Miss Garbutt's library, being in a negative mood and misliking men for the moment, had satisfied her self by asserting that she never had heard of William Wynter or his books. Why should she inform a casual stranger that a regular subscriber had -- in a fit of moral indignation -- destroyed the only copy, and paid for it? But so thoroughly did this hypersensitive young man prosecute his purpose, that he wrote to his late publisher and offered to buy up any remaining copies of "Silver Linings". His publisher, who had lost money on William Wynter, replied with curtness. William Wynter -- as an author -- had ceased to exist.

Even the Merry girls might have giggled over poor Bill's flustered self, and his flurry to prevent a mere flapper from finding her name traduced in a work of fiction. Well, really! Mr. William Wynter might be a trifle eccentric, but why go crackers over a kid who, a few months ago, had been a pitiful gawk with the reputation of not being quite all there. The Misses Merry might be realistic young women, but they too had been puzzled by the almost miraculous transformation of Rachel Waters. Why, the kid was dashed pretty in a flimsy sort of way. And Miss Millicent had ceased to expect a response from a fellow, who, when challenged to join the fighting forces, had gone scared and spluttery, and asserted that he was a crock. Crock -- indeed! According to public gossip Bill Wynter could sweat blood over that wretched old orchard.

But so rattled was this sensitive creature over a possible

misunderstanding in a book, that he even made a confident of the doctor's wife, and sought her sympathy and help. The interview between them took place in an autumnal garden. Did Mrs. Mary know that he had been an author ? She did. And had she read a thing called " Silver Linings ". She had not.

But what was the worry ? William Wynter blurted out the truth. Yes, that book had been the product of youthful senility. It was cheap and affected and too consciously clever. It fouled the Christian name of a particular person, and if read by her might cause her to think that the author was a cynical little cad.

Mary Lovell was both touched and amused. Poor dear lad, how very seriously he did take life, but she approved of such seriousness, especially so when he blurted out those particular words.

" I know she has been hurt and unhappy. I'm scared to death of hurting her in any way."

" Now -- that she is different ? "

" Like throwing mud at a flower. Do you happen to know whether there is any copy of that damned book of mine knocking about here ? "

" I don't think so, Bill."

" I want to suppress it."

Mary Lovell gave him one of her mother looks.

" Mind if I ask you a question ? "

" Of course, Mrs. Lovell."

" You are serious about that child ? She is only a child."

He looked at her straight in the face.

" I am. And frightened about it. She's only just in bloom, so to speak, and I have a feeling ---- "

"Yes, Bill."

"That one's got to be so gentle with her."

Mary Lovell smiled at him.

"You are a very unusual man, William."

"I? -- Oh, no -- I often feel an utter ass."

"Go on being that sort of ass."

- 21 -

It took William Wynter just about three hours to harvest the year's crop in Carter's Orchard, and that was mostly ladderwork, for he was determined to gather every apple for storage and observation. A Kentish expert, the member of the firm which was selling Wynter his new trees and bushes, had promised to visit him, and advise, and if possible supply names for nameless apples. The harvest itself was an occasion for Tom Lavender to give Wynter lessons in ladderwork.

"It be'n't so easy as it looks, ssir."

It wasn't, and Tom asserted that he could tell at once whether a chap knew his job by the way he worked the ladder against a tree. The best fruit had a fancy for the young wood which spired up at the tops of the old trees, and to get at it you sloped the ladder gently against a mat of branches, and there should be enough of them to take weight without damage to wood or spurs. Also, it was important to see that the ladder would not give a twist and deposit that picker -- probably with damage -- on the turf. As for climbing the trunk, that was a lout's fancy, and led you nowhere near the apples or the outlying branches. Yes, and another fancy sacred to louts was shaking the boughs and spoiling the crop by bruising it.

"You can tell a tree, ssir, where thievin' young brutes 'ave been busy by the broken wood in it."

Wynter's pick included seven sound specimens of Orchard Sweeting, five of the buxom red Orchard Juno, a dozen Russets, one or two large green cookers, a dozen yellow crabs, six Bramleys and five Blenheims. When laid out they scarcely covered a small table, and as yet Wynter possessed no specially built storage house. His idea was to sell off the trees, when

there was anything to sell.

“ Well, Tom, not much of a harvest.”

“ Don’t ‘ee worrit, sir. They old trees have had a good rest, and we be going to feed ‘em and clean ‘em.”

Mr. Augustus Roper, happening in, was shown the crop laid out in the parlour. Its modesty shocked him, and Mr. Roper wondered whether Wynter was feeling sore and the victim of a hard bargain.

“ May it be better next year, William.”

“ I feel it will be, sir. We are going to work hard on the trees.”

“ And plant more -- I see.”

“ Yes, mainly bush fruit.”

“ Well, good luck to you, William. I feel a little responsible.”

“ You, sir ? Why ? ”

“ I abetted on the adventure.”

“ It still is an adventure.”

Mr. Roper slapped him on the shoulder.

“ Good lad, that’s the spirit.”

II

Two days later the expert from Kent arrived in a small car, a quiet, all brown man, sparing of words, whose eyes looked along and steadfastly at any object before he made any comment whatsoever. His silences worried Wynter as they inspected the orchard. Was the situation hopeless, and the brown man shy of saying so ? The expert from Kent brushed away some of the scabby old bark, and appeared lost in meditation. Yes, the report promised to be depressing.

Then he stood back in the centre of one of the drifts and pointed in succession to the tops of two or three trees.

“ See that, Mr. Wynter ? ”

“ You mean that young wood ? ”

“ Yes, healthy stuff, clean bark, and there is quite a lot of it. Most of the trees you have left have plenty of life in them. Some canker -- of course -- and useless wood, and too many spurs. What do you propose to do ? ”

“ Clean up the trunks, grease band, cut out dead and dying wood, have a go at the canker, winter spray, mulch with old rotting grass and compost.”

The brown man gave him a shrewd look and his first smile.

“ Excellent. I thought you said you were an amateur.”

“ So I am, but an enthusiastic one.”

“ By the way, had any brown rot ? ”

“ Plenty. Collected and put on a bonfire.”

“ Do you know, Mr. Wynter, that is one of my tests. You would not believe the number of orchards I see with those rotting apples left to spread their spores. Just a matter of conscience and bending your back.”

“ I’m young.”

“ The young can be pretty casual. What about winter moth infection ?
Know it ? ”

“ Yes, that’s why I’m grease banding next week.”

“ Good. Let’s go and look at your sound apples.”

In the parlour, after surveying the exhibits, the brown man stroked his cheek and grinned.

“ There you are. Bramleys and Blenheims and Newton, of course, and that red and buxom person looks like Norfolk Beefing. But the others have got me guessing. So much for the expert.”

"Isn't the expert a man who says he doesn't know?"

They looked at each other and laughed.

"It's simply astonishing, Mr. Wynter, how apples can puzzle you, especially old trees which have gone out of fashion. I have been fooled -- pretty often. You see -- we moderns are becoming so standardised, all Cox and Bramley, Newton and Laxton's superb, Worcester and Ellison's Orange. I often wonder whether in twenty years time we shall be confined to about six apples for marketing."

"Rather -- unadventurous."

"But easy for the know-alls, that most English product. Oh -- about your bush fruit. You haven't got Daniel's September down on the black-currant list."

"No."

"Have it. Latest fruiter and excellent. And about raspberries. Not too much Lloyd George. So virus prone. Norfolk Giant is almost virus free, and a mighty cropper."

"Will you alter my list -- as you think best?"

"I will. And cut them hard. Don't gamble a first year's crop."

III

Miss Garbutt had bought Rachel a bicycle, and Eliza Bunkum at the kitchen window, could watch the girl experimenting on the back lawn. Eliza had been as much intrigued as anyone by her mistress's altered attitude towards her niece. The vulgar assign vulgar motives to all and sundry, the back door motives of their common selves, but Eliza could not discover any nastiness which adequately explained Miss Garbutt's

extraordinary reversion to sentimentality. Eliza, had she been capable of self-analysis and of applying the resultants to the case in point, would have asserted that no one changed, especially at Miss Garbutt's age, for she -- Eliza -- was the same acid, cheaply cynical, dirty minded prude she had been twenty years ago. " Mon Repos ", if not exactly a jocund and laughing house, had become quite conversational and stormless.

Rachel, whose wobblings were becoming less emphatic, attempted a more adventurous test, and dared the grass path which led through a rustic arch to the herbaceous borders, but a sudden lurch landed her against the woodwork, and she took a toss into the Michaelmas Daisies. Eliza, seeing legs and bicycle and skirts mixed up in disorder, had one of those intuition flashes which come even to the vulgar. Miss Rachel had fallen into the flower-bed. Coo, was some other sort of fall being played for by the old woman ?

Rachel, meanwhile had got to her feet, and Rachel was hurt. A climbing rose decorated the rustic arch, and the thorns had torn both her frock and her face, and one new stocking had suffered damage.

Eliza was interested but not sympathetic. If a pretty wench had her face damaged, so much the better, but Eliza's malice was to be shocked into surprise. A man's figure appeared between the autumnal borders, paused for a second or two, and then came swinging towards the girl. Rachel had her hands to her face, and there was blood on one of them.

Eliza stood up, and sat down again. Coo, that Wynter fellow. Sneaked in by the back gate, had he ! What bloody cheek ! But Miss Bumpus was greatly interested, and drew her chair slightly to one side so that she was partly screened by a curtain.

" Darling, you've hurt yourself."

Darling indeed ! And wasn't the damage obvious ? Rachel's hands still screened her face.

" Oh, Bill ---- "

" Let me look."

But her hands remained up, maybe from mixed emotions. Darling, and a fluttered heart, and a face that was no face for a lover to see.

" Oh, Bill -- I ---- "

" Let me look."

Very gently he took her by the wrists and drew her hands aside.

" I'm afraid I've hurt one eye."

" Oh, my dear -- was it that beastly rose ? You're bleeding."

Her right upper eyelid showed the gash of a thorn, and so did her cheek, and William Wynter still held her wrists.

" Can you open the eye ? " for she had closed her eyes and was feeling emotionally giddy.

" I'll try."

" I say, you've hurt the eye. Look here, I'll try and get hold of Dr. Lovell at once."

" Yes, Bill."

She blinked tears and a little blood from the lacerated eye, and Wynter felt her trembling. Something in him trembled with her. He let her hands go, and putting an arm round her, turned her towards the house.

" Is your aunt in ? "

" No, she's in Westings."

" Go and lie down, Rachel. I'll go for Lovell."

Her slim body seemed to surrender to the crook of his supporting arm.

" Does it hurt much ? "

"A bit."

"Damn that rose. I say -- Hullo, there's the maid."

For Eliza stood in the garden doorway, maliciously enjoying the situation. What a nice tale she would have to tell the old woman !

"Hurt yourself, Miss ?"

To Wynter, Eliza's face suggested a gloating gargoyle. It was he who answered her.

"Obviously. Help Miss Waters in. I'm going for the doctor."

Hoity, toity ! Miss Waters indeed ! And since when had Mr. Carter's Orchard become so brisk and bossy ? Eliza pushed her chin out, and put on a porcine dignity. Who was she to be ordered about by a snod-lad in velveteen trousers ?

Wynter went out by the way of the garden, and up into Harrowfield by the church path, and with him went the full and poignant tenderness of a man who knew himself to be in love. And with a kid of sixteen ! Well, wasn't she loveable, and the more so because of her young innocence, for to Wynter she was douce and virginal. Was it right and good that a man should feel protective and compassionate to a child who was not quite a woman ? He walked with a sort of fierceness, looking at nobody, full of swift, emotional exultation, and passing familiar faces without any awareness of their floating near him.

"Is Dr. Lovell in ?"

The doctor was in, writing up the details of the day's round in the surgery. He stood at the old high desk which had served in the same house for more than seventy years.

"Mr. Wynter, sir."

And Wynter was there, for he had followed the maid, and Lovell saw his

young face in the shadow.

“Hullo, Bill.”

“Rachel has had an accident, sir. Fell off her bike into a rose bush. I’m afraid she has hurt her eye.”

Just the bare details, no dramatization, no trimmings. Lovell did not ask how Rachel Waters happened to be on a bicycle, or to fall into a rose bush, or how William Wynter had happened to be there.

“Where is she?”

“At ‘Mon Repos’. I left her with the maid. Miss Garbutt’s out.”

“I’ll come along at once, Bill.”

They walked back together, and Wynter’s young fierceness became a self-conscious urge towards explanation. Rachel had been given the machine, and had been learning to ride on the lawn, and perhaps -- as an experiment -- she had dared the rustic arch, wobbled, and been clawed by a climbing rose. The thing had thorns like the horns of a rhino. And Dr. Lovell nodded. He happened to know that rose. In fact he had made a present of it to a previous tenant. Nor did he ask any embarrassing questions as to how William Wynter had happened to be there.

Miss Bumpus met them. She was smug to the doctor, and ignored Carter’s Orchard. Yes, Miss Rachel was upstairs, lying down on her bed. Lovell followed Eliza, and Wynter, passing through into the garden, recovered Rachel’s bike from the border. He looked at the rose and its green stems and studded thorns. The Briar Rose and wounded love!

So deep in sincere was his concern that it did not occur to him that he was trespassing without Miss Garbutt’s consent, and that he might be regarded as an interloper. Leaving the bicycle by the garden door, he passed through into the hall and sat down on an oak settee to wait for Dr.

Lovell's verdict. Nor was it long in coming. No actual damage to the eye, but a nasty gash on the eyelid, and another on the cheek. Wynter had stood up to face the doctor, and Eliza was listening on the stairs.

" Can I come along and fetch anything, sir ? "

" Yes, you might, Bill."

" Good. It will save time."

Wynter walked back with the doctor and returned to " Mon Repos " with a pot of ointment. Miss Garbutt was still absent, and a sour Eliza was the recipient of the soothing balm, but the balm she proposed to offer her mistress would be an acid product.

" There are directions on the label."

Miss Bumpus closed the door on him with suggestive abruptness, and carried the unguent upstairs.

But Eliza's malice went astray. Miss Garbutt snubbed her, for Miss Garbutt was secretly pleased. The surreptitious flavour of the affair promised to be good and veritable Samuel.

- 22 -

A Robbin's singing on a late October morning. There had been rain in the night, still windless rain, but with the dawn a jade green sky was flushing in the east, little flocculent clouds that blushed with the rising sun. Rachel, standing at her bedroom window, looked upon a world of marvels and of mystery, a greenness that was still dusky with the night and like dark eyes that brightened gradually, flecked with the incipient amber of autumn. And Rachel's eyes beheld mystery both within and without, the dusky garden and the dim hills that were on the edge of a golden glow, and that particular hill whose shape was growing both dear and familiar to her.

For Rachel Water's sudden blooming was not a mere flushing of the flesh. Someone had called her "Darling", someone had put his succouring arm around her, and that someone was in her heart. Her young tenderness was like the young greenness of the spring, generous, exultant, sensitive, yearning to love and to give. And standing there she watched the stormy sunlight illuminate that little hill where William Wynter's orchard changed from tranquil gloom to autumnal gold. Almost, she fancied she could see the red shape of the cottage like a spark in a pile of green boughs. Yes, she could see it. Two windows caught the sunlight, and seemed to flash a message to her like the eyes of her lover.

Turning to her mirror she looked questioningly at the reflection of her small face. The marks left by the thorns were there, but very soon they would die away. Had she any beauty -- beauty for him? Her hair had become a dark fleece, giving her face a soft allure. She smiled at her own reflection, and the smile was for herself and man. He had called her

darling, and she wondered at herself and him.

Miss Garbutt, waking with one of her eye-headaches, rang the bell to inform Eliza that she would breakfast in bed, and a white frocked Rachel, floating down the stairs, found the dining room table laid for one. Had Aunt Kate one of her headaches? Rachel was feeling kind to all creatures, and moving in a new world of strange and surprising kindness. How Aunt Kate had changed! She passed on into the kitchen and found Eliza preparing a breakfast tray, a surly and glum Eliza whose getting up was not like the lark's. Miss Bumpus lumbered out of bed with a daily grievance against life and society as it affected her. Why should she have to slave and cook and wash up and make beds for other women? She was ready to cry with most of her class -- "Down with the Snobs, up with -- Us."

"Is Aunt Kate having breakfast in bed, Eliza?"

Miss Bumpus grunted.

"One of 'er 'eadaches."

"I'll take the tray up."

Again, Miss Bumpus grunted.

Miss Garbutt, sitting up in bed, minus her spectacles and wearing a lace cap, confronted this most unexpected ministrations and her breakfast tray. Was it possible for a feigned attitude towards a particular person to produce genuine emotion towards that person? Perhaps, perhaps not. Miss Garbutt's hatred of her sister's child had set like black glue in her hair, and she enjoyed that hate. It was one of the few provocations that a sterile life had left to her.

"I'm so sorry you have a headache, auntie."

"Thank you, my dear."

Rachel laid the tray upon Miss Garbutt's knees.

"Is that -- comfortable?"

"Quite. I think I will take some aspirin. You will find a bottle in that right hand top drawer."

Rachel went for the aspirin, and her aunt watched her with looking, short sighted eyes.

"Shall I put two tablets on your tray?"

"Yes, my dear. How are the scratches?"

"Oh, nearly gone. I rode quite easily through the rose-arch -- yesterday."

Miss Garbutt reached for the tea-pot.

"Did you." And Miss Garbutt recalled an ancient saying, but she did not quote it -- "Pride goes before a fall."

Yes, the taking of tosses may be the privilege of youth. Crawling infants learn to toddle, and in the process may bloody their knees and noses, and discover that the product of the coal-box is not eatable. Arrogant louts get licked by Life, and in the process may have some elementary manners whipped into them. Philosophers may come to realise that common man may be more interested in his belly than in his head. A world that may appear drab and dreary to those who have experienced easier and more spacious years, can be stimulating and exciting fun to the young. Youth has youth, and that freshness of the senses which sees grass more green, and skies more blue, and the open road an adventure. Youth falls in love both with love and the colour and the swagger of a younger world. It lives in what is and not what has been.

So, Rachel Waters was finding life sudden and wonderful, and the strange reality of inspissated hate was below the level of her consciousness. Aunt

Kate had become astonishingly kind, and Rachel was ready to accept it as reality, and not to look below life's sinister surface upon which beauty may float like an evanescent lily.

II

Seven days, and no William.

Miss Garbutt, sensing chagrin and unrest on the opposite side of the table, wondered whether man had had his meal, and had departed replete and satisfied. But surely there had been no time for the ripening of the happy occasion. Rose had been no huntress, and her daughter appeared to be as unadventurous as her mother. Miss Garbutt, considering the situation, remembered that she possessed a cellar and no winter apples to store in it.

"Rachel, my dear."

"Yes, Aunt Kate?"

"I wonder if that nice lad has any apples to sell?"

Rachel drew a deep breath and held it for a second or two.

"He might have."

For a moment she shirked the obvious answer, but Miss Garbutt supplied it.

"You might take your bicycle and find out."

"Yes, I might, Aunt Kate."

"Be careful on the road. Have you been out on the roads yet?"

"Yes, once. I'm sure -- Mr. Wynter would let us have apples if he has any."

Mr. Wynter indeed! Had he not yet become the seductive Bill? But Rachel's excited colour and luminous eyes were very significant, and Miss

Garbutt having supplied the nice excuse, stood at a window and watched Rose's daughter set out upon the quest. Eve and the Apple Man ! Adam had been a poor, obfuscated, yet persuadable fool, and Miss Garbutt, in the part of the Serpent, hoped that William Wynter would be more quick to pursue his chances than Adam had been.

Seven days and no William, but William and Tom Lavender had been enjoying a hectic week, scraping the old scaly bark on scores of trees and fixing grease-bands, and before they had finished the job, with the yellow leaves floating down on them, a lorry had arrived stacked with young trees and fruit bushes. The consignment had to be checked and heeled in, and Tom, who knew a thing or two about the ways of nurseries, had insisted on examining the stem of every apple standard to assure himself that no careless hoeing had left a wound at ground level.

There was a second load to come, and Wynter had suggested getting help, but help would be very casual at the moment, and Tom would have none of it.

"Just kick 'em in, and say good enough, ssir. That's what we'd get from the fellahs I know of. Good plantin' and good staking, and no scampin'. Some chaps don't think that where a tree's put it has to stand for a hundred years."

So, Rachel dismounting at the orchard gate, saw two sedulous figures shovelling soil back into planting pits and treading it in, after giving the tree a shake, and driving two stakes into their proper places.

"We can band and tie 'em later, ssir."

"Have to let them settle, shan't we, Tom ?"

"No, ssir, not as we've done the job. They be about as firm as they should be. We 'aven't just knocked in a lot of clods, and left it at that."

Rachel opened the gate, and wheeling her bike in, closed the gate and

left her machine against it. William and Tom had their backs to her, and were so absorbed in the job that they were not on the look out for visitors. In fact she came within two yards of the spading figures and stood there for some seconds unnoticed. It was not until Wynter turned to collect two stakes from a bundle near at hand that he saw her.

“Hullo! Why, Rachel ---- ”

Tom, taking a peak at them, grinned and went on with the job. When two young things looked at each other in that shimmery way, it behoved an old fellow to look elsewhere.

“How long have you been here, Rachel ? ”

“Oh, just a minute. Aunt Kate has been wondering whether you have any apples to spare.”

“Afraid not. I can book an order for next year, on hope ! -- Eye -- all right ? ”

“Yes, quite.”

“I haven’t been able to leave the place for a week. Cleaning up and grease-banding, and then all this planting. You should just see the pile of crockery I have left on my hands.”

“What, washing up ? ”

“Yes. Bit of a picnic till we get this done. Tom’s going to give me a hand. Tom’s a champion washer-up.”

Tom chuckled.

“You be better out o’ doors than inside, ssir.”

“True, Tom. Guilty, I’m afraid.”

Rachel, with a sudden eager look, smiled at old Tom.

“It’s supposed to be a woman’s job, isn’t it, Mr. Lavender ? ”

“Well, I dunno, miss. My missus gets rheumatics, so I do a bit to save

her.”

“ Couldn’t I wash up for you, Bill ? ”

“ You ? ”

“ Yes, if it would be any help.”

Wynter looked at her with shimmery eyes.

“ Too much mess. Couldn’t let you ---- ”

“ But I like washing up.”

“ Like it ! ”

“ Yes. So nice to see things clean and put away. I do it when Eliza has a day off.”

Wynter hesitated. Tom was getting on with the job, and his face was invisible, but his backside might have expressed approval.

“ Well, I don’t know. It’s very sweet of you.”

And suddenly they smiled at each other.

“ All right. You’ll have to forgive the mess. Be back in five minutes, Tom.”

“ Don’t you ‘urry, ssir.”

Carter’s Cottage was suffering from male neglect in other ways than washing up. Parts of it needed washing down, and dusting, and attention to cobwebs and dead flies. Nature’s mysterious industriousness in the manufacture of cobwebs was a source of astonishment and irritation to William Wynter. Brush them down one day, and in a week they were messing up windows and window sills, and hanging from ceilings, and never did there seem to be a fly in them, or a sign of the beast that spun the webs. If only man was as indefatigable in labour ! And damn it, he had left the remnants of his lunch upon the table, and forgotten it. Two smeary plates, and crumbs, and a glass that looked as though it had not been polished for

a week.

He wavered in the doorway.

" Sorry, Rachel. You'll think me a squalid beast."

She looked past him at the table.

" I'll clear it up."

" I'm damned if you will."

She gave a little self-conscious laugh.

" Not even if I want to ? "

His eyes swept a swift glance at her.

" Well -- come on, I'll clear my own mess away. If you care to ---- "

She eased past him, and seeing a tray on the sideboard, she took it and moved it to the table.

" I know you must have such a lot to do, Bill."

He grabbed the tray from her.

" No, I'll do this. If you could put the kettle on."

She gave him a liquid and oblique look, and left him to it, and passing into the kitchen, saw that untidy stack of crockery, and silver and cutlery on the dresser beside the sink. Was it squalid to her ? No, it was not. It roused in her a twinge of tenderness, something motherly or wifely which broke to the surface of her sensitive conscious self. He must be lonely up here, poor darling, with no one to tell things to and no one to help in the house, and in her sudden new enlightenment she could suppose that men were innocent and ignorant about houses and their demands, and suffered from the illusion that a house could look after itself.

Well, now to it. She found a can of water under the sink and filled the kettle, though more than one kettle of water would be needed for dealing with two days' debris. Did poor Bill postpone his washing up until he had

no more clean plates and cups available ? There was -- of course -- no fire in the range, and it showed signs of rustiness, and a Primus stove was a creature unfamiliar to her. She was contemplating it when Wynter appeared with the tray. He had found a duster and been giving the smeary table a rub over.

“ Oh, Bill.”

“ Yes.”

“ I have never worked a Primus stove.”

“ I'll do it.”

There was no room on the sink dresser for more crockery, and depositing his tray on the kitchen table, he scowled at the unwashed pile.

“ Gosh ! You shouldn't do this. I won't let it happen again. What a foul place.”

“ I think it's a lovely little kitchen.”

“ I don't -- at the moment.”

She was turning up her sleeves, and looking for a washing bowl which appeared to have lost itself. Wynter was dealing with the Primus, and with the air of a man daring it to be temperamental.

“ Oh, Bill, where is the washing bowl ? ”

“ Damn, I must have left it in the yard.”

And in the back yard it was, propped against the wall.

“ Shall I dry while you wash, Rachel ? ”

“ No, Bill, leave it to me. I know you want to get on with your planting.”

Leave her he did, but with a backward glance over a shoulder. Sleeves turned up, dark head bent, the curve of a soft and pretty cheek showing, she was sorting out the unwashed pile, and he saw her against the sunlit lattice, strangely mature in other ways, and provoking him to other

visions. As yet he had not been conscious of loneliness and emotional starvation, but with days drawing in and lamps to be lit early, he had begun to feel restless and shut away with a constricted self. Messy things lamps, and smelly unless given adequate attention, and the chimneys would crack just when you felt tired and irritable. Well, when money began to come in he would install an electric light plant. But when would that be ? Marching out to rejoin Tom, he saw that Sussex worthy hammering in a stake with a mallet.

“ Shall we tie as we go, Tom ? ”

“ Better get plantin’ done first, ssir.”

Wynter recovered his spade, and stood for a moment staring at the next planting pit.

“ Tom.”

“ Ssir ? ”

“ Do you think women really like washing up ? ”

“ A woman of sense does it, ssir, whether she likes it or not. Same as we have to pick up rotten apples and burn ‘em.”

“ Just like that, Tom ? ”

“ Sure-ly.”

Wynter picked up the next standard apple tree to be planted, a Lane’s Prince Albert.

“ And -- Tom ---- ”

“ Ssir ? ”

“ Do you think I am going to make this place pay ? ”

“ Why not, ssir ? ”

“ Old Carter didn’t.”

“ Poor old John got stuck, ssir. Should ‘ave gone in for new stuff and new

ideas. Maybe it won't be next year, or the year after, unless this there war comes."

Wynter placed the trees in its pits, and held it while Tom spaded in soil. He gave the tree a shake.

"Just -- sticking it out, Tom?"

"You'll stick it, ssir. This ol' country's got a lot to learn about stickin' it. Gone soft -- I reckon. Too many chaps work-shy and wantin' easy money. Ever watched a gang at work at road mendin' or that sort of job?"

"Well, yes."

"Say there be six of 'em. All workin' at once? I reckon not. Four out of the six just garpin' or smokin' fags. Can't think 'ow strong fellows can loaf about life that. Tarrify me -- it would."

"I'd say it would, Tom."

III

Rachel sang at her work, and William's cottage was not "Mon Repos" where no one sang, save Eliza croaking out some hymn. The pile was lessening, and on the draining board clean plates and cups and silver glistened. Rachel, dealing with a teapot which had not had the tea-leaves emptied from it, wandered while polishing it into William's parlour. What a colourful, jolly little room. She carolled like a bird, and for why? -- as Tom would have put it. Why did birds sing, and louts jeer and squawk, and women nag, and men curse? Holding the brown teapot firmly, and polishing it with the glass-cloth, she looked through the open lattice and saw Bill and Tom at work, and suddenly she stood still, clasping the teapot

to her bosom. What if she could always be here, part of the cottage, active and happy and doing things for him? Wasn't he lonely sometimes, just as she was lonely, and came in tired to work that should be a woman's. Even washing up might be lovely when you did it for someone you loved.

Her singing died away. With an air of infinite seriousness she returned to the kitchen, and stood looking at her work, all that clean and polished stuff. Should she put it away, or leave it there for him to see?

She was still contemplating it when he stole in and surprised her.

"Oh -- Bill, you startled me."

He looked at the nice order and cleanliness she had made, and then he looked at her.

"I say, what a change! Looks wonderful, Rachel."

"Does it?"

He moved to her, and put an arm about her.

"And so do you."

- 23 -

Miss Garbutt might be a self-centred woman, but she was sufficiently woman to discover in Rachel a certain emotional excitement when her niece came in to report to her. Had not the girl more sparkle and colour than usual ? Miss Garbutt, looking upon her with satisfied benignity, wondered if the virgin veil had been drawn aside. Here was a creature who had been kissed, and whose heart was beating faster because of it.

“ Well, my dear ? ”

“ No apples, I’m afraid, Aunt Kate. You see the old orchard has been so neglected.”

“ You found Mr. Wynter in ? ”

“ Oh, yes, he and Mr. Lavender were hard at work planting new trees.”

“ And how did your bicycle behave ? ”

“ Oh -- splendidly.”

Miss Garbutt nursed her hatred and was pleased, though Mr. Thomas Lavender’s figure was not needed in the picture. Had she been told Rachel’s washing-up, a method of approach to Eros that might not have proposed to end in tumultuous romance, she would have been less pleased. That most domestic and house-maidly tenderness might not have seemed sufficiently modern and promiscuous.

Rachel, running upstairs to her room, closed the door, and sat down on her bed. How wonderful everything was ! And he had been almost frightened after he had kissed her.

“ Forgive me, darling. I ought not to have done that.”

But he had kissed her, and with sudden tenderness. Oh, lovely world ! And was she lovely to him ? She jumped up and going to her mirror gazed

long and steadfastly at her own reflection. Yes, that was the face of a girl who had been kissed.

II

William Wynter had gone back to his work, and set about it with an air of silent fierceness, so much so that old Tom had wondered whether man and girl had clashed over something. Mr. Wynter used his spade with such energy that he jabbed the stem of a tree and scarred the bark.

“Sorry, Tom.”

Tom did not say that it was Mr. Wynter’s tree to do with as he pleased.

“I’ll give her a spot of Stockholm tar, ssir.”

“Thanks, Tom -- clumsy of me.”

For Wynter was wondering whether he had been too urgent and clumsy in that other matter. Ought he to have kissed her like that? Taking advantage of a mere kid and in his own cottage. And yet her face had been douce and happy. Absurd, hypersensitive fool! But the Rachel in “Silver Linings” had not been kissed in that way. A lout’s kiss, greedy and sensual. Was he in love? Funny business being in love. Not like it was in books, or modern books. How was it that Rachel did not rouse the sensualist in him, but made him feel protective and shy and tender. Something mysterious and sacred. Well, ought it not to be that way?

And had it all fructified because she had washed up all that dirty crockery?

Strange consummation.

She had come to ask for apples, and he had no apples.

How long would it be before this old orchard gave him apples?

Finance. Yes, this business of fruit growing was a gamble, and he had any right to ask a mere child to share in the gamble ?

According to modern standards William Wynter was completely crackers.

III

It happened that evening when he took from the rack, plates that Rachel had washed, and laid them on the old oak table. It too had more than its usual gloss, and he could salute the lady of the duster. The cottage had a vine, and with the evening sunlight playing on the autumnal leaves that fringed the window, the memory of another autumn picture came to him, a memory of the last lovely English scene which he had contemplated before that mad voyage to Spain. Chanctonbury. Could he take Rachel there ? Could she manage the ride ? Well, why not train part of the way, or hire a car ? No, if they made that pilgrimage it should be alone. And what a place for a man to open his heart to a girl, and say to her -- " Darling, you are very young, and I am somewhat poor. Can you trust me and wait ? I want you to be sure of your choice, and I want to feel my feet firm on that piece of Sussex soil before I ask you to share the adventure with me." Yes, Chanctonbury, primaeval, serene, timeless, unvexed by politics, an epitome of all that had been, and yet might be. The beeches still would be in leaf, autumn leaf, tunnels and aisles of crimson and gold, the berries blood red upon the thorns, and bryony, the wind playing over the great chalk down, the sea visible, the dew ponds placid eyes.

But Miss Garbutt's consent might be necessary as a matter of policy, and if he was in love with her niece, was not it about time that he attempted friendly contact with the lady ? Maybe, gossip had exaggerated her

harshness, and that he himself had attached too sinister a significance to certain incidents. Miss Garbutt appeared to have become more human. Well, yes, he would make a formal call on Miss Garbutt and ask her to smile upon Chanctonbury and adventure.

The apple planting was completed next day, and after tea Wynter put on his best suit and cycled to Harrowfield. Eliza opened the door of "Mon Repos" to him, and Eliza had a wooden face.

"Is Miss Garbutt in?"

"She is."

"Will you ask her if she will see me. My name is Wynter."

Eliza left him on the doorstep, and took the message to her mistress.

"That apple fellah's called."

"You mean Mr. Wynter?"

Eliza gave a wooden nod.

"Says he wants to see you."

"Well, ask him in, woman. Have you left him on the doorstep?"

"I have. He's only a sort of tradesman, isn't 'e?"

Which goes to prove that Miss Bumpus, like many of her class, are more snobby than the snobs.

"Go and ask him in at once, Eliza."

Eliza returned to the front door.

"She'll see yer."

Wynter, leaving his hat on the hall table, was ushered into the drawing room, and Miss Garbutt rose to meet him, and she was most unexpectedly welcoming.

"Come in, Mr. Wynter. Do sit down. My niece is out with Mrs. Lovell."

Wynter sat down.

" I have come to see you, madam. I am sorry I have no apples, but I might get some for you."

" Very kind of you, Mr. Wynter, but I think Cook's can supply me."

" There's another matter. Would you allow me to take Rachel out for the day ? I want her to see Chanctonbury."

Miss Garbutt had never heard of Chanctonbury. Was it a ruined castle or an old religious house, or one of the stately homes of England ?

" Is it far, Mr. Wynter ? "

" About twenty miles. We could take our bikes and train part of the way."

" And what -- if I may ask -- is Chanctonbury ? "

Wynter did not gasp. He explained politely that Chanctonbury was one of the beauty spots of England -- horrid phrase -- a clump of beeches on the South Downs with an old trackway climbing to it through woods. And there were dew-ponds and superb views.

" Have you asked my niece, Mr. Wynter ? "

" No. I thought I would ask you first."

How very correct of him ! Miss Garbutt, considering the implication of such correctness, might have been displeased with them had she not remembered that Samuel Waters had pursued the same gentlemanly technique. And had not somebody said that the only difference between rape and seduction was a question of technique ?

" Thank you, Mr. Wynter. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. Yes, I think Rachel may accept. It is rather late in the year, of course, for country rambles."

" The autumn colouring at Chanctonbury -- is -- marvellous."

" Is it -- indeed ? I see that you appreciate the beauties of nature, Mr. Wynter. I hope it won't be too tiring for my niece. She is really only a

child."

"I will take great care of her, Miss Garbutt."

"I am sure you will. And what day?"

"The first really good day, still and sunny. The glass is up. May I fix Thursday -- provisionally, the Thursday after next?"

"Certainly, Mr. Wynter. And shall I put it to Rachel?"

"If you will."

The chosen Thursday was sunny, serene, and still, one of those late and glowing October days which are like golden wine to be drunk before the darker and heavier vintage of winter. Of the short train-journey, nothing need be said. That colourful coronet of trees upon the great chalk ridge was their goal, and in a haversack William Wynter carried a picnic lunch.

Everything was theirs, including solitude, and when they reached the beginning of the woodland track and their machines had become superfluous, Wynter called in at the flint and brick cottage west of the track and asked the good woman if they might leave their bicycles there. Yes, they could. He looked at Rachel who was looking with wrapt face at the towering woods and grassy slopes, and the day seemed more than good.

They climbed past the chalk pit to the little plateau where a dew-pond lay like a small circle of dark glass, and they paused here, for the view was immense and silencing. There were the flaming woods, the splendid contours of the downs, the Weald -- old Andredsweld spread below, and in the dim distance the Forest Ridge and the grey blue massive of the North Downs. They stood side by side in silence, and then Wynter's arm went round her.

"Not afraid of me, darling?"

How could she be afraid of him? She was wearing a little black beret,

and her head rested against his shoulder.

“ No, Bill. Isn't it wonderful ? ”

“ Everything is wonderful. I want to talk to you about it all.”

Then, with arms linked they set out upon the climb under the tall beeches that flamed above them, and ever and again they would pause and stand to gaze at some sunlit piece of landscape framed by the great grey trunks. There were old yews here too, and ash trees, and thorns red berried, though the black beads had fallen from the elders. Dog's Mercury and wild geranium covered the banks, and great nobbles of flint patterned the trackway.

So, they came to the open Down, and climbing a small round barrow, saw the sea. There was a breeze blowing on these uplands, and it played with Rachel's lengthened fleece, and seemed to bring more colour to her face.

“ I never knew there were such places, Bill. How did you find it ? ”

“ Oh, tramping. I used to do a lot of tramping. Now, for the Ring.”

He smiled at the thought of other rings, and taking the trackway of rabbit-nibbled turf, they came to the upper dew-pond, and then to the great clump of beeches, but to both of them there was a vague melancholy here, for some of the trees were not happy, and yellow leaves were fluttering down, sad and restless leaves.

“ Let's go back, Rachel. Happier down below.”

“ Yes.”

“ We'll picnic by the other dew-pond. I've got an old ground-sheet in my haversack.”

They loitered, arms linked, and Rachel was full of questions. Why those pools of water, and whence came the water ? Surely no people had ever lived on that windy down, and William, having some knowledge of the old

world, drew her to a bank below the beeches where the hillside sloped sharply towards the green depths below.

“ See all that low country, the old weald ? ”

“ Yes, Bill.”

“ Well -- in ancient days It was all forest and bog, just a great wilderness full of wild boars and wolves. The Romans made roads through it, but before the Romans, people lived up here on the high ground, pastured their cattle and sheep, and made those dew-ponds for water.”

“ I see.”

“ And the Downs gave them grass roads. They could travel from Beachy Head to Stonehenge, and all those Berkshire and Wiltshire downland, and escape the bog and forest down below.”

And then he laughed.

“ I seemed to be giving a lecture. Come on, let's spread ourselves and picnic down by that pool.”

They were fortunate in the day's solitude and silence. A single car had bumped its way as far as the chalk pit and disgorged four earnest gentlemen who solemnly surveyed the dew-pond and the view, and then passed upwards. No hikers, no facetious louts, or giggling girls. Time laid a large and placid hand upon the landscape. Wynter, spreading his ground-sheet below a bank, gave her the haversack. The ordering of the feast should be hers.

“ I hope the sandwiches are all right. They may be a bit thick.”

“ Did you cut them ? ”

“ I did.”

Ham sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, cakes, fruit, all neatly wrapped in waxed paper, a bottle of cider, glasses, and a small tablecloth. Rachel

unpacked them and laid them out, and Wynter sat and watched her. Food first, and then the confession he had planned to make to her. He reached for the cider bottle and unscrewed the top.

"I thought it right and proper that we should drink our toast in cider, Rachel."

Her dark eyes lifted momentarily to his.

"Yes, Bill. Are you going to make cider?"

"No, darling, I hope not. Other kinds of apple needed."

He half filled the glasses, and passed one to her.

"You -- think of something."

She was smiling.

"Next year's crop, Bill."

"That's a good toast. I hope it is going to mean a lot to -- us."

They drank, looking into each other's eyes, and Wynter thought of the old song: "What gentle eyes were hers for a man to pledge."

She passed the sandwiches to him.

"No, you first, Rachel."

"How well you have cut them."

"And no washing up, darling, and no litter left behind."

Then, a fateful silence fell upon them, and over yonder in the sky rooks were playing, diving and swirling and climbing like planes in a dog fight. Wynter frowned as he watched them. War in the air. He had seen it, and maybe he had the feeling that those black birds were innocent yet sinister symbols.

"Rachel."

"Yes, Bill."

"I have something to say to you. May I?"

" Yes, Bill."

" I love you, darling."

" Oh, Bill -- I ---- "

" Wait. Listen a moment. You're so young, my dear, and I'm not going to rush you into things. What's more, I'm a poor man, and I want to make good. No shabby show for you, if I can help it, Rachel. Do you understand ? "

" Yes, Bill."

" Will you wait -- until I feel I have the right to ask you to marry me ? "

She put out a hand to him.

" I'll wait -- for ever and ever."

So, for half a minute they sat holding hands, and looking at the sunlit scene.

" Rachel."

" Yes."

" Let's go on like this -- just as we are, until you and I feel sure. Can you trust me ? "

" Yes, Bill, of course I trust you."

" We'll keep the secret, our secret."

He looked at her fingers.

" Some day we'll call it the Chanctonbury ring."

- 24 -

Miss Garbutt, playing the affectionate aunt, was intrigued by her niece's intricate silence, her mono-syllabic answers.

" Had a good day, my dear ? "

" Yes, Aunt Kate."

" And what was Chanctonbury like ? "

" Oh, lovely."

There was a dreaminess about the girl, an ammiatory air that interested Miss Garbutt. Had the Angel of the Lord visited Rachel Waters in the guise of man, a reincarnation of Samuel ? Had there been raptures and embraces on some green bank ? Miss Garbutt, with all her prudery, could contemplate those passionate experiences which in her case had left her -- if not a virgin -- consolably sterile. Yet, had she known how simple and sentimental the actual scene had been, veritable Jane Austen, Miss Garbutt might have felt exasperated. This Milk and Water fool who looked a Bloomsbury Juan, and should have lived in the pages of the " Sunday at Home ", and who kissed fingers and gazed devoutly at a girl's face instead of tumbling her into some grassy bed !

But if she could keep her secret and hope for the social shaming of this mere child, youth too was capable of reticence. Suffering may turn a man into a cynical exploiter of all his chances, or make of him a creature more sensitive and chivalrous than his fellows, and Wynter had suffered much. Chivalry is not utterly obsolete, though rather out of fashion, and to Wynter this child-girl who too had suffered was more than a mere emotional mate. She was ready to trust him, and he would honour that trust.

Mr. Augustus Roper was the man he chose to consult, and on his way thither he stumbled upon a rather touching incident which matched his own mood, two small children, a boy and a girl, and an unfriendly, hostile looking rough haired terrier. The small girl was scared, and the boy, three inches taller than she was, put an arm round her and confronted the dog.

“ Don’t be afraid. I won’t let him hurt you, dear.”

Wynter, joining the group, eyed Mr. Terrier with smiling steadfastness. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings !

“ Hullo, old fellow. Coming for a walk ? Let’s all of us go together.”

He took each child by the hand, and his downward glance was for the boy.

“ Good lad. Stand up for the lady, always.”

The dog wagged a tail and joined them, and Wynter, seeing himself in that small boy, felt more sure of his meeting with Mr. Augustus Roper.

The two children and the dog accompanied him as far as the great white door in its Georgian doorframe, and Wynter handed out sixpence to each child, and a pat to the dog.

“ Buy some sweets.”

“ Oo -- thank you, sir.”

Yes, the omens were good, and Mr. Roper was not engaged with a client. He pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and turned from the conveyance he was reading.

“ Well, William, what can I do for you ? Draw you a will ? ”

Wynter laughed at the playful suggestion.

“ Strange but true, sir. And some advice.”

“ Well, well, well ! Sit down, my lad.”

“ You’ll forgive me, but I want this to be absolutely confidential. Could

you draw up my will yourself, sir ? ”

“ I can, William. Sit down and give me the details.”

“ Just a moment sir. A question. A girl can marry at sixteen if she so chooses ? ”

“ She can.”

“ And any property she inherits -- is her own -- and beyond outside interference ? ”

Mr. Roper's bushy white eyebrows were up. What the devil was the lad driving at ?

“ Yes, but at that age I would suggest a trust, until she is of age.”

“ Would you take on such a trusteeship, sir ? ”

“ Supposing you tell me -- more -- of the someone you have in mind.”

“ Of course, sir. Miss Garbutt's niece, Rachel Waters.”

Mr. Roper's eyebrows became so active that his spectacles slipped down upon his nose.

“ What -- that child, William ? ”

“ Yes, sir. I'm utterly serious. We -- understand each other, but the understanding is a mutual secret.”

“ You mean ---- ? ”

“ She is very young, and I want her to be sure and have her chance. And I'm not yet in a position to marry. Wouldn't be fair to her.”

“ Does Miss Garbutt know ? ”

“ No. It's our own affair.”

Mr. Roper picked up a paper-knife and played with it.

“ As the girl's legal guardian she might raise objections.”

“ Isn't a girl of sixteen free to choose ? ”

“ In some ways, yes. Her guardian cannot compel her to go on living in

her house. But this will of yours ? ”

“ I want to will everything I possess to Rachel.”

“ You mean -- in the event of your dying ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Not a very likely -- event.”

“ I hope not. But that is what I wish, sir. You may think it just a gesture.”

“ I think it a very creditable gesture, William, if a little unusual, but the unusual may be more than good. You should nominate a second trustee.”

“ Do you wish it, sir ? ”

“ I’m an old man, William. Anyone to suggest ? ”

“ I would like Dr. Lovell. Shall I ask him ? I think he will understand.”

“ And the witness, my lad ? If it is to be so private a matter ---- ”

“ Mrs. Lovell. Wait a moment -- old Tom Lavender. I think I can trust old Tom.”

“ Yes, good Sussex oak, William. Well, shall I draw up the will, and you can approach the others ? ”

“ If you will, sir, and thank you so much.”

The doctor’s house was as welcoming as the lawyer’s, and neither of them were mocking houses. Lovell was out for the moment, and Wynter made his astonishing confession to Mary Lovell. Did she think him an eccentric ass. She did not. Being a woman who had been loved with integrity and tenderness, she was on the side of the romantics and ready to bless young lovers. She did not catechise her confidant, or improve occasions, or suggest this or suggest that. They were a couple of children to her to be helped and mothered.

“ I think you are a wise man, William. I have a feeling that you can give

devotion and get it."

"She's a darling. So gentle."

"Yes, my dear, no bald, plucked, bold young bit with painted fingernails, and more masculine than male. It is easy to be gentle to the gentle."

"You do understand things, Mrs. Lovell."

"Thank you, William. Frank should be in soon. I think he too will understand."

Now, Dr. Lovell, having joined the conspirators, and knowing more about the backstage than William Wynter did, was moved to a fatherly but silent laughter. Whatever Miss Garbutt's game was, and the doctor had not been fooled by the new, sentimental décor, these two innocents appeared to have her nicely fooled. She might sit and glower like a black cat at a closed window while two birds billed and cooed outside it. Yes, he -- Frank Lovell -- would serve as a trustee in partnership with Mr. Augustus Roper.

William Wynter, looking immensely serious, put in yet another plea.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Lovell. May I have a few words alone with the doctor?"

"You may, Bill."

Lovell took Wynter by the arm, and they passed out and across the passage to the consulting room.

"I want you to vet me, doctor."

"You look pretty fit, William, for a man who is going to make a will."

"It isn't -- so much the physical, sir. I sometimes get jittery about that other phase of mine. Is there any likelihood of a recurrence?"

Lovell looked at him with affection.

"Not the slightest -- I should say. You are living about as healthy a life as a man can. And you have somebody else to think of."

"Yes, that's my reason."

“ And about as good a reason as a man could have. Don’t overwork, and don’t worry.”

Wynter smiled at him.

“ If that orchard of mine makes money -- there will be no worry.”

“ I have a feeling that it will, William.”

II

Alone again with his wife, the doctor filled a pipe and lit it with an air of reflective deliberation.

“ That’s a good lad. Good luck to the two of them. Sensitive about -- everything. Wanted me to assure him that he was fit to be a husband.”

Mrs. Mary had lit a cigarette.

“ A dear lad. I wonder what the Garbutt will say when she discovers ---- ”

“ Yes, I have a feeling that her reactions may be -- surprising.”

III

On an afternoon in December, with the last of the leaves falling, and a red winter sun setting in a frosty and cloudless sky, Wynter walked in the orchard and looked at his trees. Their crusted trunks had been cleaned and grease-banded, and dead wood cut out and burnt, and the wood ash given to the black currants. When the fear of frost had passed the sprayer would go into action. As for the old, matted, weedy grass, it had become a sward going grey with dew, and the movings were stocked in a corner of the orchard to rot for compost. A pile of good dung steamed by the orchard

gate, and the rich savour of it spread itself on the still air. A good smell to the countryman, though it might cause Bloomsbury to hold its nose. Rachel was cycling up for tea, and he was riding back with her.

A car passed the gate, a red car, but Wynter paid no heed to it. He was man among his trees, somehow feeling that they were with him in this little world of purpose and of hope. Would Rachel mind that smell? The thought caught him unawares. Well, dung was dung, and you could not spray Eau de Cologne over it. The car had braked noisily and stopped half way down the hill, but Wynter had not heard it. The red ball of the sun was near the horizon, and Wynter glanced at his wrist-watch. Rachel was late, and he walked to the gate, opened it, and stood in the road.

Then he saw her. She was wheeling her bicycle, and he got the impression that something had happened. She was limping slightly, and as he hurried to meet her he saw that one stocking had a rent in it.

"Darling, what's happened? Had a tumble?"

She looked white and scared.

"That car. It came round a corner -- on the wrong side."

"Hit you?"

"No, I fell off. And the man ----"

"What man?"

"I think it was that Emlyn Griffiths. He wanted to get me into the car."

"Damn him!"

"Yes, put his arm round me."

Wynter looked fierce.

"I know the gentleman. By God, I'd like to -- I'll take the bike, darling. Have you hurt your leg?"

"Grazed it, I think, Bill. But that man frightened me."

“Damn him! Nasty bit of work. I must have a look at that leg of yours.”

Wheeling the bike with his left hand he put an arm round her, and helped her through the gate, and maybe that pile of dung should have felt aggrieved, for neither of them reacted to its reek. So, Mr. Emlyn Griffiths, having come near to knocking a girl into the ditch, had found her to be pretty, and eligible for fatherly concern, and an arm that was ever ready to encircle feminine waists.

“Sit down, darling. Let me have a look.”

She was still a little breathless, and to Wynter her sensitiveness to unpleasant contacts was more than a revelation, if he needed it. This creature would ask for the gentlest of touches. She was sitting on the sofa, and he kneeled down, and with deft fingers peeled down the torn stocking to uncover a red streak on the white skin.

“I think the pedal hit me.”

“Looks like it, darling. The skin’s not broken. Hurt much?”

“No, just a smart.”

“Put your feet up and I’ll get tea.”

“Let me help.”

“Not on your life. Only got to make it. You will have tea on the sofa.”

And so she did, with a stool beside her, and two cushions stacked at her back, and her torn stocking once more in place. No longer was she breathless and fluttered, but somehow sure and secure, and looking with happy eyes at her lover. Wynter, sitting sideways at the table, saw her whole and loveable, not as a comely creature to be possessed with mere animal gusto, but as one whose pain and fear, laughter and happiness would always be his.

“Quite Darby and Joan. Some day, darling, you will be pouring out tea at

this table.”

She looked at him, steadfastly, smiling.

“ And I shall wash up.”

“ No you won’t, all by yourself. Share and share alike.”

“ Oh, Bill, you are sweet to me.”

“ Not very difficult, darling. Have another cake.”

IV

Ridiculous young creatures ! A part of Harrowfield might well have asked itself whether a soft skinned mutt like Wynter expected to make a profit where a Sussex man had failed, and how he was going to stand up to the big buyers if he had any fruit to sell. They would just skin him. Or did the young fool propose to sell his fruit to Harrowfield itself, or perhaps in Westings ? So sure was Public Bar Harrowfield that this here Foreigner would fail that they did not credit him with being able to distinguish between a one and a two pound punnet, or a wireworm and a leather-jacket.

But William Wynter was reading much and thinking more during those Winter evenings when his lamp was lit and his log fire burning. Even the dead trees from Carter’s Orchard were giving him the live warmth and the sweet smell of old apple wood. He had listed every tree in the orchard, and each tree’s progress in productivity and its individual whimsies were to be put on record. He had mapped out plans for the future, possible expansion, more land if the venture paid.

Moreover, he was becoming a man of his hands, sinewy and tough, and capable of dealing with marauding louts, as certain of them were to

discover. It is a popular superstition that no toff can compete in labour with a worker, a superstition that Wynter was to disprove, as it was being disproved by certain of the more enlightened agriculturists. A public school lad might have brains as well as brawn, a combination that may be absent in the so-called worker. One notable farmer whom Wynter was to meet in later days was specialising in the training of educated lads, and finding them a remarkable improvement upon the ordinary farm-hand. The best of them were keen, teachable, quick movers, and they had manners. When checked for some error, they did not snarl -- "Do the bloody job yourself --" or "I can finish." The stupid and rude arrogance of an ignorant man can be one of a country's major curses.

Tom Lavender was watching Wynter, and with some astonishment and secret chuckles. The lad had hands, and he could stick it, but the thing that surprised old Tom was the speed with which his amateur had taken to his tools, spade, hoe, pruning shears, saw and billhook. An amateur with a spade can be the village joke, but Wynter had gathered the skill and rhythm, that easy turn of the blade which marks the old hand. No shoving in of the spade at a slant and a resulting tilth of six inches. Tom knew many a country chap whose digging was easy-osy. Moreover, Wynter went at it steadily, and did not seem to tire. He had become an expert in handling the motor-cultivator. He could swing a felling-axe with some precision, and not produce a mauled and splintered stump.

And William Wynter had ideas, ideas that intrigued and stimulated old Tom. This lad might go big if given the time and the opportunity.

Mr. Lavender chuckled.

Public Bar Harrowfield might still refer to William Wynter as a bloody fool of a toff.

Malicious man might be destined to receive rude and unwelcome shocks.

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Wynter's will had been drawn, signed and witnessed and was lodged in Mr. Augustus Roper's private safe. Tom Lavender had scratched his head over the signing of that document, for, though not knowing its contents, had been puzzled by so healthy a lad preparing for a demise that might be forty years in the future. Yet, Mr. Wynter was a young man with a head, and a capacity for seeing further than his fellows, and Mrs. Lavender, when told of the affair, tittered at her Tom, and pointed a revealing finger.

"Isn't there a girl somewhere?"

"A girl? Only that there Miss Rachel, and she be only a kid."

"Kids grow up, Tom. My old grandmother was married at seventeen. Besides -- she's more than a kid, if you ask me."

"Gosh, mother, maybe you're right. And she be a pretty creature. Give me a gal with a soft eye and a soft voice, not one o' they bold as brass wenches."

Now, Miss Kate Garbutt, expectantly watching for other developments, began to suffer from impatience. Here was a raw girl who had been tossed at a modern male, and so far as observation served her there was nothing physically expectant about Rachel. No sudden buxomness about the breasts, no maturing of the figure. Miss Garbutt went so far as to show an interest in the laundry basket, and it revealed nothing to her save negation.

Was the amour actual, and Mr. Bloomsbury or Chelsea or What Not wise as to nature? Moreover, even her aunt's secret malice had to confess that Rachel had changed her face if not her figure, a face that was happy and in full flower, and yet as silent as a flower. "Mon Repos" never produced

confidences, though Rachel spent more time at " Mon Repos " piano, and her playing was like a bird song. That fool Rose had been such at her piano in her Samuel days, and singing " I'm in love, I'm in love, You can tell by the light in my eyes." Miss Garbutt glowered as she listened. She had done everything to encourage the affair, suffered her niece to go gallivanting as she pleased, dressed the victim for the sacrifice, and got nothing but " Bitter Sweet " and Strauss Waltzes, and the murmur of a love that was without fear.

It may be difficult to make certain characters credible on paper, and had William Wynter attempted it he might have bungled the picture. Kate Garbutt combined an insane and arrogant egoism with blank self-righteousness, and in the matter of self-criticism she was stone blind. Her cynicism in contemplating all the baser motives which activate humanity beheld nothing but the mere lusts of the flesh, and both gloated over them and damned them. And the strangest fact of all was that it did not occur to her that William Wynter and Rachel Waters were lovers in the Shakespearean way, with a protective tenderness on the man's part and a happy and devoted trust on the woman's. Yet, so urgent was her malice that she began to throw out innuendos, produce matriarchal hints and warnings to a girl who did not grasp their unpleasant significance.

" Aren't you seeing rather much of Mr. Wynter, my dear ? "

Rachel's secret was serene in her, and her face unfertile.

" We're -- friends, Aunt Kate."

" I see. I hope Mr. Wynter treats you as a friend."

" Of course, Aunt Kate."

" Men -- can be -- dangerous, my dear."

Bill dangerous ! If only her aunt knew ! But Rachel was wide-eyed and

untroubled.

"You need not worry about William and me, Auntie."

Was that so? Miss Garbutt's hook had landed no fish, and so displeased was she that she did about the silliest thing a woman could do, spread suspicion, and began the adventure by approaching the very woman who could baffle her.

She called on Mary Lovell. She sat solidly on the sofa before the Lovell fire, and with unctuous deliberation opened the debate.

"I have come to consult you. I am very seriously worried."

Mary Lovell was suspicious and on guard.

"About -- what, Miss Garbutt?"

"My niece."

So, that was it. Mary Lovell lit a casual cigarette, and savoured the smell of it and of this intriguing situation.

"In what way -- may I ask?"

"My niece -- is -- er -- not quite normal. You may not know that her mother died insane."

"Indeed. I should have said that Rachel is -- quite untainted in that way."

"Superficially so, yes, my dear Mrs. Lovell, but even in growing up she has shocked me with her resemblance to my poor sister. You see -- the marriage was a disaster, and her father a dissolute scoundrel."

Mrs. Mary blew a smoke ring, and became even more casual.

"Quite melodramatic, my dear Miss Garbutt. And how can I help in the matter?"

"I think you first introduced my niece to the young man who owns that orchard."

“ Oh, Bill Wynter. As a matter of fact I think they introduced each other.”

“ They are seeing a great deal of each other.”

“ And what of it ? ”

“ I am seriously worried. I read one of Mr. Wynter's books, and judging by his fiction he is not the kind of young man to be trusted with a neurotic girl.”

Mrs. Mary put her head back and indulged in jocund and spontaneous laughter, laughter that might have been intended to reassure Miss Garbutt.

“ Poor dear Bill ! Such a good lad. I am sure he would be shocked -- by any suspicion. I think the book you are referring to must be ‘ Silver Linings ’.”

Miss Garbutt was looking ominous and turgid.

“ That -- is the title.”

Again Mrs. Lovell laughed.

“ Do you know what he calls it, Miss Garbutt ? Premature tripe. I can assure you ---- ”

But Miss Garbutt had not come to be reassured, or to be laughed at, and she interrupted Mary Lovell.

“ You may be a little credulous about men, Mrs. Lovell.”

“ Am I ? Now, that is one of the nicest things I had had said to me -- ever. To be quite frank, have you come to me for an opinion as to the character of a particular young man ? ”

“ I feel -- madam -- that you are somewhat responsible for the ---- ”

“ Friendship ? ”

“ I do not wish to use a cruder word.”

Again that jocund laugh.

“ My dear lady, does it not occur to you that these two very likeable young people may be in love ? ”

Miss Garbutt glowered.

“ That might be even more disastrous, madam. With her heritage, my niece is not fit for marriage.”

Mrs. Mary blew another smoke ring.

“ Would you prefer frank adultery ? ”

Miss Garbutt rose slowly to her feet.

“ Your frivolity shocks me, Mrs. Lovell. I must conclude that you and I have nothing in common.”

“ Thank you, Miss Garbutt. You are full of compliments.”

Miss Garbutt waddled her own way out of the house, and Mary Lovell sat on before the fire, but unlaughingly and with no blowing of smoke rings. How much she could have told Miss Garbutt had she so chosen or been at liberty to reveal the protective fondness of a young man's will. And did a man will all his property to a girl whom he was proposing to seduce ? It was here that Mary Lovell gained a startling glimpse of what might be maturing in this other woman's mind. Could this old wretch be planning to make trouble ? Did she wish Rachel Waters to be the victim of an amorous cad ? And failing such a denouement was the Aunt prepared to poison pure romance by declaring that her sister's child had a heritage which forbade both marriage and the bearing of children ?

Mary Lovell threw her cigarette end into the grate. Could such beastliness be possible or credible ? She was sitting staring at the fire when her husband came in from a late round. He was cold and tired, and he joined her at the fire.

"Something bothering you, Mary?"

"Do I look it, Frank?"

"What I call a household face. Cook being temperamental? Yes, I know you always try to keep domestic conflicts to yourself."

"I have had a visitor, my dear."

"Oh -- who?"

"The Garbutt woman."

Briefly she revealed what had passed between them, and her own reactions to the other woman's attitude.

"I feel there is something very sinister behind it all. She is bent on making trouble. To me -- the woman is not sane."

Her husband was warming his hands. Tired he might be, but a problem such as this challenged the physician in him.

"Emotionally -- insane -- on a certain subject. I wonder what the real history of it all is."

"My feeling is -- Frank, that she has a persecution complex against Rachel. I believe she hates the girl. Balked in one way she has changed her tactics."

Lovell nodded.

"I rather think you are right. I wonder if that sister of hers married the man she had selected for herself."

"That's an idea, Frank. It might explain -- her attitude to Rachel. Pretty horrible -- and what ought we to do about it?"

Lovell was silent for some seconds.

"I rather think she is up against a reality that she does not understand."

"You mean ----?"

"In her nastiness she knows neither the man nor the girl."

"Being the fool of her own malice."

"Yes, just that. Two young things in love as they should be, and the spirit of evil -- frustrated."

Mary Lovell laid a hand on her husband's shoulder.

"Oh -- wise man. Ought one to warn William?"

"I'll think that over. The move that would checkmate her is obvious."

"You mean, Frank?"

"Marriage, without her knowledge or her consent. But William has his own point of view, and it's a generous one. A girl of sixteen, and his own future just a question of -- apples."

II

Dr. Lovell, having slept upon the problem, and reconsidered it while shaving, with a cheerful winter sun shining upon a frosted window, came to a decision which he broached at breakfast.

"I think I'll have a word with William."

"I think I should, Frank. He is such an unsoiled creature."

The doctor, taking Carter's Orchard early on his morning round, saw Wynter and Tom at work upon an over-grown hedge and the ditch below it, the old man busy with a billhook and the younger using a sickle and fork to clear the ditch of rubbish. A fire blazed beside them, with a rolling cloud of smoke piling up into the still air. The hedge and the ditch belonged to the owner of Fox Farm, but Wynter had been given permission to deal with both of them.

"Hullo, Bill."

"Hello, sir."

"Can you spare five minutes?"

"Of course."

Wynter picked his jacket from the hedge.

"Better go inside, sir. It's a bit fresh out here."

As they turned to go old Tom pitched an armful of hedge cuttings on to the fire, and the thorns went up with a crackle of flame. Lovell paused to glance at the blaze, for these country sights and sounds and smells were good and real to him.

"A final cleansing, Bill."

"Yes. Old Tom believes that plenty of pests winter in ditches and hedge bottoms."

"Old man's wisdom."

"Yes, sir, good country lore."

A coal fire was burning in the cottage parlour, and Dr. Lovell got the impression that the place was more clean and polished than it had been. Maybe Wynter was becoming house-proud as well as orchard proud, and the doctor, whose work took him into many interiors, was a professional connoisseur in the matter of cleanliness. The English could be and often were the dirtiest and most untidy of people, and he had been astonished by the slovenliness of those who should have known better. Some women would dress themselves up on the Sabbath, and keep their kitchens in a state of squalor, nameless filth in buckets, false teeth in tea-cups, the cat and the bread together on the kitchen table, flies on the food, dish-cloths stinking, everything smeary. If charity began at home, it should be bracketed with cleanliness, and Dr. Lovell classed integrity and self-respect with the condition of a kitchen.

"You look nice and clean here, Bill."

Wynter smiled at the compliment.

"Well, I have the hang of things more. Once or twice I got in a bit of a mess."

"Easy when you are all alone -- I should gather. There is a certain matter that I want to talk over with you. Not mere interference, my lad."

"Go a'head, sir."

"Have you had -- any contacts with Miss Garbutt?"

"Very little."

"Well, don't trust her. Between ourselves there is something sinister about that woman."

Wynter was frowning.

"You are hinting at something, sir, about Rachel?"

"I am. The lady called on my wife yesterday, and when she told me about it and what passed, we both of us felt -- troubled."

"Can you tell me, sir?"

"No, Bill, I don't think I'll tell you everything, but what I will say is -- the lady pretends that she is worried about you and Rachel."

"She need not be."

"I know. But I think she wants to be worried. Both my wife and I feel that -- she's -- sinister."

"You mean, sir, about Rachel?"

"I do. There is some unpleasant secret at the back of it all. Watch out, my lad."

"I will, sir."

Dr. Lovell went upon his way, and Wynter returned to old Tom and the clearing of ditches. Tom had piled more hedge cuttings on the fire, and it

was in fine form, red of heart and brilliant as to its billowing smoke. Wynter, leaning upon his fork, watched it for half a minute, with the doctor's warning worrying him. Just what had Miss Garbutt said to Mary Lovell? Something macabre, or Lovell would have told him. And remembering the cruelties of a few months ago, and that frightened little face which had blossomed into womanhood, he wondered whether Miss Kate Garbutt was preparing other poison.

Well, he would have an antidote to that.

Tom, turning to glance at the static figure, saw that stern young face. What had the doctor said to the master? But Tom said nothing, but went on with his work.

"Tom."

"Yes, ssir."

"Pretty wonderful getting a blaze like that with green wood."

"Just gunnin', ssir. Begin small and with patience. Get a red, hot heart, and she'll burn anything."

Wynter's face softened in a smile.

"Something like us, Tom. A warm heart and life goes on."

"Yes, ssir. Maybe it be just like that -- and your heart can be like that when you be young."

"Yes, Tom."

"Remember what the Great Book says, ssir. Perfect love casteth out fear."

- 26 -

Miss Eliza Bunkum was very much mistress of her kitchen, and even Miss Garbutt treated it with respect. Cooks were cooks these days, and didn't Eliza know it, and though she had the eyes of a sour gooseberry, she had hands and could cook. Now, as it happened there had been tiffs between Miss Garbutt and Eliza, and the domestic atmosphere was brittle and electric, for Miss Garbutt had trodden with a heavy foot upon Eliza's cat, and there had been words and clawings so far as the cat was concerned. "Mona" -- was the one creature upon whom Miss Bumpus lavished affection, though why she had chosen that name was a mystery.

Moreover, Miss Rachel had a liking for the tabby, which was reciprocated, and Eliza was not jealous, and in her funny, sour way she had reacted to the new Rachel. Mona had set the fashion, and her mistress was developing an elemental urge towards a young and pretty thing with that thunder-cloud of an aunt. Mona rubbed against Rachel's legs and purred, but when Miss Garbutt appeared, the cat sat aloof on a chair and regarded the lady with hostile indifference. Eliza could indulge in secret sniffs and comments. That cat knew a thing or two. Never had there been such a cat.

"Oh, Eliza, I wonder if you could teach me to cook?"

Eliza was peeling potatoes when that most significant question was asked.

"I might, dearie."

"You are such a wonderful cook."

Mona was rubbing against youth's legs, and Eliza's wooden face became almost benign. Wonderful cook, was she? And that cat knew a thing or two.

“ Every woman ought to be able to cook. Oughtn’t she, Eliza ? ”

Mona had been gathered up and was purring.

“ Yes, dearie, ‘specially if you want to keep a man in good temper.”

Did Rachel blush ? And was she thinking of cooking for that Wynter lad ?

Well, why not ? And sacks to Miss Garbutt !

“ Have you a cookery book, Eliza ? ”

“ Not me. Don’t believe in books. Yes, you come in here on the quiet. It’s apple tart today, and I’ll show you.”

Neither of them raised the question of Miss Garbutt’s pleasure or displeasure, nor did Rachel imagine that her aunt would disapprove when so much license was being allowed to her. Pudding bowls and pie-dishes could be postulated when bicycled went unforbidden. So, Rachel, with her sleeves turned up, and wearing one of Eliza’s aprons, began her culinary education.

Miss Garbutt kept her supplies locked up in a store cupboard, and remembering that Eliza had asked for sugar and baking powder, she unlocked the cupboard, extracted a pound of sugar and a tin of baking powder and proceeded to the kitchen. The door was closed, but she heard voices, her niece’s voices. What was Rachel doing in the kitchen ?

Opening the door suddenly she beheld that surprising scene, Rachel and Eliza side by side at the kitchen table, and the cat watching from a chair.

“ What are you doing here, Rachel ? ”

Rachel turned a bright and innocent face.

“ Eliza’s going to give me cooking lessons.”

“ Indeed ! I have not been consulted.”

Eliza turned her snub nose on the lady.

“ Very sensible -- I call it. A gal ought to know ‘ow to cook afore she

gets married."

Miss Garbutt glared and was silent. She deposited the sugar and baking powder on the dresser, and departed with one of those looming looks. For the incident was unpleasantly revealing. Rachel learning to cook ! Education for modern marriage. Miss Garbutt waddled into the library and sat down on the sofa. What was the meaning of all this ? Cookery did not mate with intrigue. Surely that Wynter fellow and her niece were not going to fool her by taking each other with sentimental seriousness ?

Kate Garbutt had the chance of her lifetime to spread the sudden wings of a divine humour, or to remain the black bog of hatred which had surrounded her during all these years. Had she had any feeling for youth, and especially for youth in its flowering season she could have emulated sour and crusty old Eliza.

She sat and glowered at the fire, her large fat hands clasped in a knot in her lap. Obesity in certain persons has been described by the vulgar as " Cold Fat ", but Kate Garbutt was seething fat. Her immense egoism confronted frustration, but before the winter fire she found an answer in the deeps of her malevolence. Let Rachel and that lad go on dreaming their sentimental dream, if they were so dreaming it. Let the perfume of orange blossom promise to scent the air, and then -- she -- like some black fate, would spill the last dose of poison into their loving-cup.

Kate Garbutt rose and going to her bureau, unlocked it and drew out the secret drawer. She had at one time cultivated amateur photography, though the craft had ceased to interest her, but she possessed one photograph in which had been concentrated all her swarthy hatred of a certain person. She searched for it and found it, the picture of a woman sitting up in bed, wild of hair and of eye, her nightdress hanging torn

from one shoulder, lips averted and her teeth biting at her clawed fingers. It was a monkey face, a mad monkey face, that of Rose Waters the day before her removal to an asylum.

Kate Garbutt slipped the photograph back in the drawer and relocked the bureau.

Would any man be fool enough to marry the daughter of the monkey-faced lunatic in that picture ?

II

Wynter had begun to make other human contacts, the Wilmers of Fox Farm ; Arthur Dowling -- artist and seller of antiques, and the Maynards of Furze Hill. Christmas was near, but Christmas was for other homes, yet why not a New Year's party ? The Wilmers had children, three jolly kids, and Wynter was feeling like a party. He put the proposal to Rachel.

" I want to throw a party, darling. Could I get a dozen people into my parlour ? "

" If you moved the table out, Bill."

" And where should we put the cakes, etc ? "

" The table could go in the passage, with one flap down."

" So it could. I don't seem to have much vision, do I ? "

" Will there be any children ? "

" The Wilmer kids, three of them. That means sweets and crackers."

" Won't it cost you rather a lot, Bill ? "

" Oh, one must celebrate sometimes."

" I might make some of the cakes."

" You ? "

" Yes, Eliza is giving me cooking lessons."

He had an arm round her, and he put his lips to her dark hair.

" Aren't you wonderful."

" Am I, Bill ? "

" I wonder whether I ought to ask your aunt ? "

" You might, Bill."

" I'll think it over."

But Wynter was to receive a letter from Miss Garbutt before he sent her an invitation. Miss Garbutt's letter was curt but courteous. It said :

Dear Mr. Wynter,

There is a matter I should like
to talk over with you -- personally, and as friends.
Perhaps you can call on me one afternoon,
and stay to tea, if you can spare the time.

Sincerely yours,

Catharine Garbutt

The lady wrote on superfine blue paper, and her handwriting was like herself, round, thick and emphatic. Wynter read the letter twice, and again between the lines. Was this the first move in some unpleasant play, or was it the privileged and conventional gesture of a woman who felt somewhat responsible for her ward, and who had begun to conclude that there was a sentimental relationship developing between her niece and a

man named William Wynter ? She might wish to challenge him both as to his sincerity and his prospects, and after all she had some right to do so.

And did Rachel know ? He had a feeling that she did not know, and was not meant to know, and he was willing to leave her out of the triangle.

He wrote by return. Would Thursday -- before Christmas -- suit Miss Garbutt ? She replied that it would, and thanked him for answering her so promptly, and her letter ended with a hint that was more than broad. Rachel would not be at home, for she was going shopping at Westings.

Hum, a tete-a-tete between the lady and the lover ! Wynter put the letter in his pocket, and smiled over a more secret and happy prospect. Westings ! He too was going shopping in Westings, but on the Wednesday morning, and the quest was a Christmas present for Rachel.

III

Westings was in a Christmas mood on that last Christmas before the war, and Wynter found himself on crowded pavements in that part of Victorian Westings which could be pompous and depressing to those who liked neither Victorianism nor being pushed and jostled. Windows full of food, oranges, crackers, imported fruit ; other windows exhibited decorative superfluities which could become domestic nuisances ; rows of turkeys pendant-red necks like a rhythmic frieze. Wynter, after staring into the windows of two jewellers' shops, turned away from the solid scuffle, and made for old Westings by way of the sea front.

Here was another world, that of men who put to sea in ships, and of a community that had been more individual and mutually interdependent. The smith, the carpenter, the boat-builder, the net-maker, the bricklayer,

had been persons, and inevitably needed by each other. So much of the modern world is superfluous save in the making of superfluities. Old Westings' narrow High Street, with its two grey churches towering on the hillside above, was Tudor, Jacobean, Georgian, Regency, a mellow mixture and complete in its happy contrasts. Alleys and passages, and flights of steps disappeared into mysterious lights and shadows. Georgian parapets and pilasters confronted timber and plaster and high peaked gables. White door frames, fan-lights and doors stared at Jacobean oak. There were high houses and low houses, high pavements and low pavements. The motor world might curse the street, and the old houses retort with scorn -- "Why all this noise and fuss? Where are you all going, anyway? And what do you do when you get there?"

Wynter, wandering up the High Street, and pausing to enjoy some of these old houses and the goblin humanism of an older England, could almost hear these various buildings exchanging caustic comments. Some might use the language of Marlow, others that of Defoe and Fielding, others good Johnsonian. Did any of the moderns gaze with comprehension at lattice or sash, timber and plaster, or Georgian brick and Regency stucco? Then, he stood still with his back to a particular window. He thought -- "That which I see -- is I, and only mine in its meaning. There are millions of other I's, and millions of other sense -- worlds. Strange, that I never thought of it in that way before. The same pattern and yet how different! And is the secret of good comradeship the choosing of a partner who responds to the same picture?"

He faced about, and discovered that particular window. It might have been waiting for him, an old window full of quaint old things, china, glass, brass, and silver, a tray of rings, brooches and bracelets. He stood

and stared at that tray. It was a coincidence, and more than a coincidence.

One ring in particular caught his eye, heart-shaped, an old silver setting, an amethyst in the centre of the heart surrounded by tiny emeralds and brilliants. He peered and tried to read the price on the label, but could not do so, but the ring with its unusual colour-clash charmed him. Well, he could go in and ask the price, and if it proved too heavy, choose something else. But that ring -- somehow -- was Rachel, and destined to be Rachel.

A gentle old man served him, and taking the tray from the window, placed it on the counter.

“How much is that heart-shaped ring?”

“Twelve pounds, sir.”

Wynter hesitated. He had only ten pounds in his wallet, and even ten pounds would have been extravagance for a poor man who was proposing to live on apples.

“Sorry. It’s a lovely thing, but I’m afraid I can’t afford it.”

The old man was looking at him in a kindly way, and with a secret and humorous comprehension.

“Well, I’ll take ten, sir.”

“Would you? That’s very decent of you.”

“Wanted for a particular person and occasion, sir?”

They looked at each other and smiled.

“It is. I’ll take it. Some things are worth a little extravagance.”

He walked out of the shop with the ring in his pocket. Extravagance. Damn the cost! Were not generous risks worth taking?

IV

Rachael, mounting the Green Line bus to Westings, knew nothing of the forthcoming conference between her aunt and William Wynter. She had two pound notes in her bag, partly pocket-money she had saved, but one pound note was a present from Miss Garbutt. A week ago her aunt had bought her a short fur-coat, covey, but sumptuous to Rachel, and one lad in the bus looked at her appreciatively, but with no response from a girl in a day-dream. She was going to buy presents for William and Aunt Kate, have tea at the Cardoma Café, enjoy the Christmas shop-windows, and catch the six o'clock bus home. What should she buy for Bill ? A pipe ? And how kind Aunt Kate had been about this visit to Westings.

“ Mr. Wynter will be in to tea, Eliza.”

“ Yes, mum.”

“ I do not wish Miss Rachel to know.”

That was sufficient for Eliza. And Miss Garbutt was wearing her black velvet frock, a pretentious frock. So, the lad was to be put through his paces, and Eliza was persuaded to listen at a door.

Mr. Wynter arrived in his best lounge suit, and Eliza took his hat and coat, and was almost motherly. She could have said, “ Watch out, my lad. The old besom's got her funeral frock on. Watch out for monkey tricks.”

Eliza, minus her shoes, overheard part of the conversation. It began on conventional lines, and Miss Garbutt's voice was throaty and obesely condescending. How was the orchard progressing, and did not Mr. Wynter find the cottage somewhat lonely ? William was balancing a tea-cup and waiting for the situation to develop.

“ Now, Mr. Wynter, I have a certain matter to discuss with you. I think

you will admit that I speak with a full sense of responsibility."

"Certainly, Miss Garbutt."

"You and my niece are seeing a good deal of each other."

Wynter stirred his tea and nodded.

"Does that worry you?"

Miss Garbutt gave him one of her looming looks.

"Rachel is very young, and I believe -- very innocent."

"Which you ain't," commented Eliza on the other side of the door.

William Wynter hesitated for a second or two. Should he tell Miss Garbutt the truth? Some day she would have to know.

"I understand that very well, Miss Garbutt. You see, I care rather much, and in a way -- that ought to reassure you."

"You mean, Mr. Wynter ----?"

"Rachel is very young, I know, and I have to make good. But some day -- I hope that Rachel will marry me."

There was a ponderous silence, and Eliza's comment was, "Coo, -- now -- her fat -- is in the fire."

"I must confess that -- this -- is a serious surprise to me, Mr. Wynter."

"I did not think it necessary to tell you before because Rachel and I -- have agreed. You see -- I wouldn't hurt her -- for anything in the world. I want her to have time -- to be sure."

Miss Garbutt refilled her own cup, and appeared to be considering this confession. Her solid and ominous face remained inscrutable, but inwardly the fat was seething.

"I shall have to consider this problem, Mr. Wynter. It may not be so simple as you imagine. No, no questions, please. The responsibility is mine."

“ Now, what’s your bloody game ? ” said Eliza to herself, thinking it time to retreat to the kitchen.

Wynter, walking home, was not too happy about the interview. Had Miss Garbutt some sinister card tucked up her sleeve ? But what problem could she produce which could throw any shadow of discord between them ? Nothing.

The sky was heavy and starless, and as he reached the orchard gate the first snowflake began to fall.

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There may be a suggestive truth in the old saying that it never rains but it pours, and that snow produces snow, and that the more a woman talks the more she comes to believe in the high ethics of her rendering of the subject. Not that Catharine Garbutt sought other confidences. She talked and talked to herself like a woman picking a piece of old lace to pieces, until she could declare that she was justified in administering a potent emetic to these two young fools. Miss Garbutt had thought William Wynter a rather nice fool, which indeed he was, but a nice fool should be saved from his folly. Was he to be permitted to marry a girl with a mental heritage such as Rachel's, and perhaps produce defective and socially septic children? Some sort of emotional shock was needed to restore these two young sentimentalists to their senses.

Wynter drew back the curtains on a white world, a world of goblin phantasy, pure and ethereal. Snow capped the hedges, ribbed the old trees, and transformed the familiar landscape into strange contours. A robin, perched on a slat of the fence, uttered a few cheerful notes, and turned a hopeful black eye on the windows. Crumbs for the birds, and on his dressing-table, Rachel's ring.

He whistled to Mr. Red Breast, and picking up the ring, let it lie and glisten in his palm. Would it please her, and would it please her aunt if Rachel wore it? He could see the white roofs of Harrowfield in a haze of misty sunlight, and presently the Harrowfield bells would be ringing out the old joyful message: "Christ is born". Well, he would walk into Harrowfield later in the morning, and leave the ring with Rachel. Did Miss Garbutt sport mistletoe? In the words of Eliza Bunkum -- "Not

bloody likely."

Breakfast, household chores, his six Sussex pullets to be fed, a bunch of mistletoe suspended from a beam, holly festooned round a mirror. He whistled as he worked, the old carols he had sung as a boy, Old King Wenceslas, Noel, and Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Even Miss Garbutt might show herself benign on so completely Christmas a morning.

II

Rachel, drawing back her curtains, saw the same snowy scene, and was thrilled by it. A glaze of frost covered a part of the window, and with a forefinger she traced upon it a mystic letter -- W. Turning about she saw a white object protruding under her door. A present? She crossed the room and stood holding a large envelope.

Rachel sat down on the bed, and slit the flap with a pair of scissors. A photograph! She drew it out and sat wide-eyed, staring at that mad face and figure. Written below it were the words ----

Should the daughter of a mad mother marry?

III

Wynter, with the ring wrapped in cotton wool and safely boxed in his pocket was getting into his overcoat when he heard the sound of footsteps, soft, swift, muffled footsteps, yet audible in the morning stillness. The latch of the gate clicked, and those flurried footsteps fluttered to the door. The door itself trembled as though some weight had fallen against

it.

“Hullo. Who’s there?”

No answer. He lifted the latch, and the door swung against him, and for the moment he was off his balance. She had been leaning against it, breathless and panting, her arms over her face. He let the door swing back and caught her.

“Darling, what’s the matter?”

She clung to him with a sudden spasm of sobbing. She hid her face against him. Her coat was buttoned to her chin, and he could feel some unfleshy substance beneath the cloth. She seemed unable to speak. She shook and subbed with a kind of wild abandonment.

“Darling, what is it?”

And still she sobbed, and hid her face from him.

“Rachel, darling -- what has happened?”

“Oh, Bill, how can I tell you -- but I must.”

He lifted her up and carried her into the parlour, and sitting down on the sofa, held her in his arms, but her face remained hidden.

“What is it, darling? Look at me.”

And suddenly she seemed to make a supreme effort. She straightened, and when he saw her tragic little face the love in him was profoundly shocked.

“Bill, I can’t marry you. I had to come and tell you. Oh -- darling ---- !”

“What -- has -- happened?”

With trembling fingers she unbuttoned her coat, and drew out the fatal picture. She held it so that he could see it, her eyes blurred with tears.

“What’s -- This?”

“My mother.”

" But -- good God, how did you ---- ? "

" Aunt Kate pushed it under my door."

" She did that ? "

" Yes, Bill. It must mean the end of everything."

His stern young face was fierce. He stared at the dreadful thing, and then, very gently, he lifted her off his knees and set her on the sofa. He took that picture from her, tore it half with one swift gesture, and going to the grate, stuffed it into the fire, and crushed it down with his foot.

When he turned he saw her sitting rigid, hands clasped, eyes fixed in a glazed stare. There were tear drops on her cheeks, but she had ceased to weep, and for one dreadful moment he saw her as the picture he had crushed into the fire. His anger at the foul thing that had been done to her flamed into white tenderness and compassion. Also, he was conscious of poignant fear. Had that she-devil infected the daughter with the mother's madness ?

He stripped off his overcoat almost like a man about to use his fists, sat down on the sofa, and drew her towards him. Her body was rigid and unresisting. Leaning back, he eased her head on to his shoulder. Her eyes still stared, and her face was blanched and dumb. Gently and tenderly he began to stroke her face and hair. For ten minutes or so there was silence while those almost mesmeric strokings continued. He heard the clock ticking, and the cheerful chirruping of sparrows. He watched her face. Her eyes still had that glazed look. Good God, he must get that cataleptic stare out of her eyes.

Suddenly he saw her eye-lids close, and she sighed. He felt her body relax.

" Lie quite still, darling."

Again she sighed.

" Oh, Bill, why must it be ? "

" There is no must about it, Rachel."

" I -- I -- can't go back."

" You are not going back."

" Where can I go ? "

" You are not going anywhere. You are staying here with me."

She struggled up and faced him.

" But -- I -- I -- can't."

He drew her down again, and held her close.

" I love you, darling. There is nothing that my love can't do for you."

" Oh, Bill -- I do love you so."

He kissed her hair, and then he remembered the ring. He groped for the box, and held it in the palm of his hand.

" Look, Rachel. I was bringing you a Christmas present. Look, darling."

Her fingers trembled, but she took the box, opened it, and saw the ring lying in its bed of wool.

" Oh, Bill, how lovely ! "

" Like you. It's your engagement ring, darling. Shall I put it on ? "

" But, Bill ---- "

" Put your finger out."

Her face had lost its stricken look.

" May I wear it just once ? "

He slipped the ring on her finger, and watched her face, and then he clasped his hand over hers.

" It's staying there, Rachel, as you are staying here. And we shall want another ring, a gold one."

" Oh, but Bill ---- "

The anguish had come back into her voice, and he drew down her head upon his shoulder.

"Listen, Rachel. I want you -- as I want nothing else in the world. We are going to be happy, so very happy. And there is something I have never told you, so you will understand me as no one else ever can or could do. I was in the Spanish war, and was buried by a bomb, and afterwards -- I was a poor, shaken, frightened thing. It was a doctor who sent me into the country to try and get my sane self back, doing simple things. Well, here life came back to me, and then you came into it -- just as though God had sent me -- the one person whom I needed. You can't leave me now, darling, any more than I can leave you."

She lay curled up, with eyes closed, as though asleep, and yet listening to music. Oh, wonderful reality! He needed her as she had ever dreamed of being needed, and that poisonous picture had brought them as close as two human creatures could be to each other.

"Oh, darling, can it be true?"

"Utterly true. We shan't be rich, Rachel, but it is all in the adventure. My God, how happy I am!"

She sat up and looked at him fixedly.

"You are not afraid of me, Bill, or what I might be?"

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Darling, how could I be?"

The urge was inevitable, and he held her close and kissed her, not once, but many times, and her lips were his.

Then, a sudden joyousness possessed them.

"Come on, Rachel. Lots to do. I was going for my Christmas dinner to the 'George'. Now, we'll have our dinner here."

She was up, and moving on dancing feet.

"I can cook, Bill. Let me cook."

"Our first Christmas dinner. I have a joint -- of sorts."

He became aware of the bunch of mistletoe, and putting an arm round her, he kissed her beneath the berries.

"Now, then, let's get to it. Can you manage, darling? I have another job to do."

They passed hand in hand into the kitchen, and it was a clean kitchen.

"We had better light that fire."

"I'll do it."

"No, not a job for white hands. Dinner may be a little late, what?"

"Nothing matters, Bill."

"Nothing, nothing at all."

But something very much mattered for the moment, and very seriously so, and leaving the kitchen to Rachel he climbed the stairs and opened the door of his small spare-bedroom. It was even less than sketchily furnished, and his choice was instant. His own room should be Rachel's room, and he could use the other room and sleep on the couch in the parlour. Clean sheets -- etc., he did possess, and he set about stripping his bed, and moving most of his belongings to the other room, and as he did so he faced the various issues. What would that old hell-cat do when she discovered that Rachel had left her? And what was he to do about the frocks and etceteras that Rachel had left at "Mon Repos"? She had nothing but what she was wearing. Assuredly, he might expect a visit from Miss Garbutt, and would it be better to forestall the attack? Advice and assistance needed. The Lovells? Yes. He would go over to Harrowfield in the afternoon, with or without Rachel. Maybe, Mary Lovell would take her

for the next few days.

And marriage ? Yes, the sooner the better, and at a Registrar's office. All the legal details would have to be looked into. Mr. Roper could help him there. The sooner Miss Garbutt was faced with the accomplished fact, the better. But what an incredible old sadist !

He was stripping the bed when he heard her calling.

" Oh -- Bill."

" Yes, darling."

" I can't find the fat."

" I'll come."

" And have you a Christmas pudding ? "

He hurried down the steep stairs.

" Fat -- somewhere. Yes, and we have a pudding, a tinned one. I'll do the opening."

He found her with her sleeves turned up, and the fire in good heart, and the small joint in its pan. She looked flushed and happy.

" What are you doing upstairs, Bill ? "

" Preparing my lady's chamber. You are going to have my room."

" Oh, Bill -- I can't take your room."

" Yes, you will. I can even lend you pyjamas. I've been thinking things out. We'll go and see the Lovells presently. You want all sorts of things, and the confounded shops won't be open for two days."

For a moment she looked frightened.

" If -- she -- comes here."

" Let her. I'll settle any harshness from her. And, darling, I have a feeling that you shouldn't take anything from that damned house.

" I feel like that too, Bill."

" Well, that's settled. I know the Lovells will help us. And so will old Roper. Tell me, Rachel, would you like to go to the Lovells ? "

She hesitated for a moment.

" I would rather be here, Bill, with you."

The sentimental picture was complete, snow, Christmas, bells, mistletoe, a robin at the window, and let it be confessed -- a joint that was somewhat tough, but they sat down to it with faces that were tender.

" I'm afraid it hasn't been long enough roasting, Bill."

" Is it your first joint, darling ? "

" Yes, by myself."

" Well, here's to the next. Nothing -- today -- could give me indigestion."

" Oh, Bill."

" It's going to be splendid fun -- here."

There were wine glasses on the table, and Wynter had opened a lonely half bottle of claret which he had bought for some chance yet possible occasion. He filled her glass and his, and stood with raised glass.

" It's up to you, Rachel."

She rose, and was silent for a moment, smiling. Almost it would seem that the horror of that dreadful picture had faded from her consciousness, and her eyes were soft and happy.

" I know. Apples, Bill, thousands of apples."

" Great idea ! Your apples and mine. The Garden of Hesperides."

They touched glasses and drank, and then he kissed her with devout tenderness.

" May I never hurt you, darling. We are in this game together."

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" Mon Repos " had overslept itself on this Christmas morning, and Eliza, getting up with the grumps, was the one to discover the emptiness of Miss Rachel's bedroom. The bed had been slept in, and Miss Rachel's clothes hung in the wardrobe, and the display included her new cheap fur coat. Well, well, well ! Had Miss Rachel gone to early service ? Again, in the words of that other Eliza -- " Not bloody likely."

Miss Bumpus felt elated. Here was a nice sensation, and a Christmas shock for Miss Garbutt. Eliza had decided that she had had an overdose of Miss Garbutt, and would try a more comfortable corrective.

Carrying a can of hot water she knocked at her mistress' door.

" Your hot water, ma'am. And I think Miss Rachel has left us."

There were sounds as of an upheaval, and then Miss Garbutt opened the bedroom door.

" What did you say, Eliza ? "

" I think Miss Rachel has left us."

" Don't be absurd, woman."

It was on the tip of Eliza's tongue to say, " Absurd, am I ? Well, if you ask me, you look a bit of a mess in the mornin'." But Miss Garbutt crowded past her with a face of fury, made for her niece's room, and saw all that Eliza had seen, save that the one object that interested her was missing.

She turned back upon a secretly grinning Eliza.

" I expect Miss Rachel has gone to church."

Eliza's dumb grin was eloquent.

" Lay breakfast as usual."

Miss Bumpus gave her a wooden nod.

II

Footsteps in the snow, many on the Harrowfield pavements, some in the churchyard, but no news of a lost girl. Miss Garbutt, wearing her furs, and a black jockey-cap, went so far as to ring the Lovell bell. An unfriendly maid answered it.

“ Is my niece -- Miss Waters -- here ? ”

“ No,” said the maid, and closed the door upon her.

In the church path leading down past her garden Miss Garbutt picked up the trail. It descended towards the high road. So -- that was it ! Rachel had fled to her paramour, a pleasant word for a Christmas morning. Those particular footmarks joined a few other footmarks which pointed in both directions, but when Miss Garbutt had climbed the hill, and paused -- somewhat out of breath both physically and emotionally -- she saw her arrows diverging towards the orchard gate. They linked the gate to the cottage, and to Miss Kate Garbutt, unpleasantly satisfying. She opened the gate and added her splodges to those more youthful footprints. What did it matter if her turkey would be over-done and her pudding cold ? She believed, suddenly and exultantly, even in the thick of her anger, that she had the grim occasion at her mercy, and could call her sister's child a wanton.

She opened the gate and walked to a window. The flicker of a fire came from within, and putting a looming face closer she saw the two standing and touching glasses. She saw Wynter kiss Rachel, and she could even hear the tender words he uttered.

“ May I never hurt you, darling ---- ”

And so absorbed were they in each other that they were unaware of the

woman at the window.

Miss Garbutt waded to the porch. She saw the cheap old knocker, and she put her hand to it, and thundered. She -- the dark Angel of the Lord -- would do the hurting.

Rachel's eyes went wide and dark.

"Who's that?"

"I'll see."

"Perhaps it's -- her."

Said Wynter calmly, "I hope it is. Stay there, my sweet. This is my show."

It was one of those occasions when a cold ferocity cloaked in courtesy can be more potent than any ranting. Miss Garbutt was prepared to do the ranting. She saw the door open, and that stern and set young face. William Wynter opened the door wide, but he kept his hand on it, and his eyes on Miss Garbutt's face, and his body blocked the doorway.

"Good morning, Miss Garbutt. I hope you are enjoying your Christmas."

Facetious fool! And Wynter was wondering why women like Miss Garbutt favoured jockey caps.

"My niece is here, I think."

"She is. And staying."

"Indeed!"

She made as though to push in, but Wynter stood firm, and his eyes never left her face.

"As her future husband, Miss Garbutt -- I must congratulate you on your Christmas present to her."

"Young man, I ----"

"Wait. That nice present has been a great relief to me. You see, I was a mental case -- for a while -- due to the Spanish War, so Rachel and I -- are

more than comrades. You will excuse me, but we have not quite finished our Christmas dinner."

What insolence ! Miss Garbutt heaved.

" You will release my niece -- instantly -- from this immoral house."

And William Wynter laughed.

" Dear lady, we are to be married next week, so the hypothetical immorality will soon be corrected. Meanwhile our pudding is getting cold. Good morning," and he closed the door on her and turned the key.

Miss Garbutt was not quite done with. She plodded to the back window, hammered on it, shouted.

" Rachel. Come out at once. Come out, do you hear me ? "

Rachel was standing by the fire, and Wynter saw that she was trembling. That scolding, arrogant voice had -- for so many years -- frightened the hypersensitive child in her, and William Wynter's cool anger flared into fierce scorn. He went and opened the window.

" You are a very disgusting person, Miss Garbutt. Do you mind removing yourself. As I told you -- our pudding is getting cold."

Deliberately he reclosed the window, keeping his eye on her furious face, and with equal deliberation he drew the curtains, and waited. Silence. No more battering on the window. Miss Garbutt was floundering back to the garden gate.

Wynter joined Rachel by the fire, and his arm went around her.

" Exit Setanas -- I think. Now for pudding."

She turned her face to his.

" Oh, Bill, you were splendid."

" Was I ? To be absolutely honest, darling, I should like to have clouted her filthy old face."

III

The curtains remained drawn, and Rachel and William, having pulled the sofa up to the fire, sat with their arms around each other, Wynter smoking a pipe, Rachel her first cigarette. For Miss Garbutt's cup of poison had roused in Wynter a mood of tender playfulness. No screaming, wild-eyed figure of tragedy should tarnish this country cottage.

"Better begin the sinful habit, darling, in this most shameless house."

He had lit the cigarette for her, and watched her innocent way of handling it.

"Now for the next move. Your dear aunt may try tearing a tantrums to tatters. Funny, that in trying to hurt you she has given me -- you."

"You're not frightened, Bill, about me?"

"I could ask you the same question. What's your answer?"

"I shall never be afraid with you."

"Same here. I think we will stroll over presently and see the Lovells. I want them to know."

"Yes, Bill."

"She may ask you to stay."

"I would rather be with you."

"Thank you, darling. But there are certain simple things needed. Face gloves, tooth brushes, night gear and what-not. Mary Lovell might be able to help."

"Perhaps. I have a feeling, Bill, that I don't want to take anything from Aunt Kate or her house."

"Just what I feel. Everything new and clean and yours. And then I think I would like a few words with Mr. Roper. I want to get all the legalities in

order. Will you mind a registry office marriage, quiet and quick ? ”

“ No, I mind nothing, darling.”

“ And your sweet relative will be faced with an accomplished fact. What an incredible person ! No, I don't want to know -- the why and the wherefore. Let's bury all that and forget it.”

The splendour of a winter sunset was theirs as they set out for Harrowfield. The old trees were patterned against it, each with an individual character of its own. To a townsman they would have been mere apple trees, but Wynter was beginning to know them all like familiar yet differing faces, some rugged and bearded, others suggesting woman. They stood for half a minute at the orchard gate, gazing at the dark aisles and the sunlit splendour of the snow, and Wynter, moved by a sudden whimsy, raised his hat to the trees.

“ A happy Christmas to you, my dears, and please remember how important you are going to be -- to us.”

Rachel smiled up at him and waved to the trees, for this tender playfulness was like balm to her after the bitter years she had known.

“ I am sure they understand, Bill.”

“ If they were real gentlemen, darling, they will do their best for the pretty lady.”

The Lovells had finished tea, and were settling down to read before the fire, and to Mrs. Mary in particular, Christmas had a note of sadness, and maybe her husband knew it. No children in the house, no presents to be prepared, no games to be played, no Christmas tummies to be comforted after too much celebration. So, when the bell rang, and Mrs. Mary, who had let the maids off, went herself to the door, and saw those two young things, her heart warmed to them. The young did not trouble about the middle-aged

unless they wanted to be with them.

“Hullo ! Come in, and a happy Christmas.”

Rachel put up her face to be kissed.

“May we ? ”

“I hope we’re not in the way ? ”

“The old folk are at home.”

Wynter smiled at Mrs. Mary.

“Might I be kissed -- too ? It’s a rather special occasion.”

He was kissed.

“Meaning, Bill ? ”

“Rachel and I are engaged, and it will be about the shortest engagement on record. We are getting married next week.”

Mrs. Mary had her arm round Rachel.

“Well, well, well ! Come in and be congratulated by Frank.”

But after the first pleasant preliminaries the house divided for mutual confidences.

“May I have a word with you, sir ? ”

The doctor took his pipe and William Wynter into the dining-room and lit the gas stove, feeling in his bones that he was to hear a strange story. But it was to be far more strange and sinister than he had expected, and Wynter, filling and lighting a pipe, straddled a chair, and gave the doctor one guess.

“What do you think, sir, that old woman gave Rachel for a Christmas present ? ”

“Something macabre ? ”

“Very.”

“Well, I’ll give it up.”

"A photo of her mother in an acute state of dementia, and under it the nice inscription, 'Should the daughter of a mad mother marry?'."

Lovell's head rose in a shocked jerk.

"No? My God, what a ----!"

"I could supply the word, sir. Shoved it under her bedroom door. She came to me, poor darling, in a state of horror. Well, I put that right, told her my own story. Of course -- she is not going back. But that old beast followed her up. Oh, yes, I got rid of her all right."

Dr. Lovell bit hard on his pipe.

"So, marriage?"

Wynter was smiling and looking at the stove.

"Yes, someone to work for, someone to care for, someone to whom one feels protective -- and gentle. What more could a man ask for? It will be utterly good for him, and by the Lord God -- I'll try to make it good for her. Any doubts, sir?"

"No, Bill, I don't think so. In a way, you two young things are complimentary. But that old woman!"

"She must be a pretty miserable old wretch -- right down inside herself."

"I should say so, Bill. Almost I could say -- I hope so."

Rachel was sitting on a tuffet and leaning against Mrs. Mary's knees. She too told her story and had her hair stroked while she told it, and to Mary Lovell such sadism was more credible than it had been to her husband, for she held the belief that the gentler sort of man was more innocent than his womenfolk. So, William had stroked Rachel's hair and caressed crude fear from her. Good for Bill! A woman may thank God for a man who can be a sensitive simpleton.

" You can come to us, Rachel, dear."

" I know you would say that. You are such a dear, but I want to stay with Bill."

" But, my dear ---- "

" Need I fear what people might say ? But -- I want Bill to feel that I trust him."

" I think I understand. Well, I may be able to help in other ways. You can't go near that house."

" No."

" Or take anything."

" It all belongs to her."

" That's a moot point, but I won't question it. Nothing but what you are wearing ? "

" Nothing."

" I can lend you what you need. Shall we go upstairs and rout around ? "

Rachel turned and clasped Mary Lovell's knees.

" You are -- wonderful. You just help and don't ask bothering questions."

IV

Miss Kate Garbutt, stoding back through the snow, and feeling mocked by those particular footprints, and more and more enraged by the cool way that impudent lad had dealt with her, saw no beauty in this Christmas scene. Contradiction of any kind had always enraged her, and in spite of her plumpness she was cold and hungry. Utter frustration, and an hour or more late for her Christmas dinner, and Eliza in the sulks, though Miss Garbutt trod heavily both upon pavements and other people's moods and

tempers.

Harrowfield was empty and at the dinner table, and Miss Garbutt, having in her inward turmoil passed the opening of the church path, followed the main road. A bus and a couple of cars passed her, the cars clanking chains, suitable music for the lady, nor did she attach any particular significance to the bus.

“ Mon Repos’ ” door was unlocked. She passed in, closed it, shouted.

“ Eliza, I’m back. You can serve dinner.”

No answer came to her. The house was dead and silent, and on the dining-room table she saw a joint becoming greasily cold, and a pudding in the same condition, and on her plate a piece of paper with a message scrawled upon it. “ I’m fed up. I’ve had my dinner and left. I’ll send the railway man for my trunk. You can do your own washing up.”

And that was Miss Garbutt’s second Christmas present.

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So bright was the night, with a full moon shining upon a white world, that Dr. Lovell did not need his headlights when he drove Rachel and William to Carter's Orchard. The shadowy and taped wheel-marks in the snow were a sufficient guide, and the road was empty of all traffic. The chains on the back wheels kept up a rhythmic chatter. Wynter, sitting beside the doctor, nursed a suite-case, and Mrs. Mary and Rachel sat close together on the back seat.

"Well, here we are. I hope you two won't find the fire out."

"I'm afraid we let it out for safety. That can soon be mended."

Rachel had her arms round Mary Lovell's neck.

"Thank you -- ever so much. You've been lovely to us."

"I echo that," said William.

Lovell switched on his head-lights as they opened the orchard gate, as though to light them happily home. The old trees, crusted with snow, staged a winter phantasy. Halfway to the cottage the two figures paused, turned about, and waved.

"Bless them," said Mrs. Mary.

Lovell reversed the car into the road, and switched off the headlights.

"Unconventional, Mary, but somehow good."

"Rather like you, my dear man."

"Humility should come with age. Now for home and the fireside."

When they reached the garden gate Wynter pushed it open, set the suitcase down, and produced the key.

"I'm going to follow an old custom."

"What, Bill ? "

" Take the key. I'll carry you in."

He gathered her up, and walked to the porch, and held her close to the door.

" Can you see the keyhole ? "

" Yes."

" Open Sesame."

He laughed, kissed her, and carried her in.

Moonlight was shining into the parlour, and putting her down upon the sofa, he took the box of matches from his pocket, and lit two candles on the mantelpiece.

" Lamps later. Now for the fire."

" I'll do it, Bill."

" No, stay put. I know where everything lives. Gosh, if I haven't left your suite case out on the snow ! "

He went to recover it, withdrew the key from the door, and closed and locked it.

" Here we are. And I'd left the door open. Would you like to go up and get straight, while I relight the fire ? "

She swung her slim legs off the sofa, and with her hands on her knees, shook her head at him.

" I am not going to take your room, Bill."

" But, darling. I've got everything ready for you. I'm going to sleep down here on the sofa. And I can wash and shave in the kitchen."

" Why should you ? Let me sleep down here."

He wagged a playful finger at her.

" Are we going to begin our first squabble ? Why, hang it all, out in Spain I slept on cellar floors, and in slit trenches. Besides, I'm on guard,

the faithful watch-dog."

He took one of the candles and her suitcase, and prepared to lead the way, and with a mute but eloquent look at him she followed. The little room was all ready for her, and by candlelight she could see the clean pillow, and the coverlet and sheet neatly turned down. The drawers were half open and empty, as though welcoming her few belongings. And suddenly she clung to him with a poignant tenderness, her head against his shoulder.

"I do love you, Bill, I do, I do. It's all so different here. You are so good to me."

There were two candles on the mantelpiece and he lit them for her and leaving her to unpack, went below to re-lay and re-light the fire. What a day! Had ever more good come out of evil in a few short hours? Kneeling, and raking out the grate, he paused now and again as though reflecting on the significance of this symbolic act, fire, warmth, home, a love that was gentle and protective. And what an innocent, sweet creature she was, child and woman! He would stand between her and all beastliness and fear.

He whistled and laid paper and dry wood, some coal and apple logs. He had become an expert at fire-laying and fire-lighting. Crumple and crush the paper down but not too much so, slope the wood upwards, and lay the coal gently on the pyre. He was doing it for her. Ye Gods, everything he did now would be for her.

Rachel was sitting on the bed, dreamy of face and eyes. What a lovely little room was this, with its colour and its peacefulness, the cretonne curtains drawn across the window, the open drawers waiting to be filled. The candle flames were steady and straight and made him think of the man below. Oh, wonderful world! She was to share it with him, work for him, now and for ever.

She listened. She could hear him whistling as he lit the fire, and moved by a sudden impulse she went to the head of the steep and narrow stairs.

"Bill."

"Hullo, darling. Everything all right?"

"Yes. I just wanted to say, I love you."

II

Supper. Colourful china on the gate-legged table, the fire well ablaze, and her Windsor chair set close to the fire. It was she who had laid the table; she had insisted on it, her first job in their house. Wynter had sat on the sofa and watched her, and been touched by the soft serenity of her virginal face. Years ago, when he had written "Silver Linings" his picture of woman had been hard and gay and garish, Soho, and slang. He had tumbled from boyish romanticism into the crude sex materialism of the moderns. He had read his up-to-date philosophy, and been taught that which man had claimed for himself -- promiscuity, was also the right of woman. She should appreciate variety, a negro or a chink, and enjoy that which her body justified. Had Shakespeare been a sentimental fool, and the Fathers of the Church senile mystics? And as he watched this child-woman moving about the room he realised that other wisdom had come to him through suffering. There were infinite subtleties in sex, phases of timidity and shyness, virginal shrinkings, perhaps an organic dread of the male, moments when woman might ask to be touched gentle or not at all. She could be a creature of mystery whose ultimate surrender might be as symbolical as the birth of a Christ.

So, there he was, back in the world of sensitive children, of fairy tales

and Father Christmas, the Babe in the Manger, fantasies that may be real to the greatly simple, and mere absurdities to the clever fools. How would that douce and dreamy face have reacted had he clawed at her like some intoxicated cad? He remembered those two children and the dog.

“Don’t be afraid, dear. I won’t let him hurt you.”

What would Freud have made of that?

III

In fact there was a conscious aloofness in his mood towards her, a sensitive restraint, and when they had finished the washing-up and put everything away, he left the sofa to her, and straddled a chair. He smoked his pipe, and gazed at the fire, and listened to the silence of the snowbound world without, for silence can be listened to. It was in accord with his own feeling of unselfish holding back.

“Tired -- darling?”

“Yes, a little.”

She lay relaxed with her head on a cushion, looking more child than woman.

“Go to bed -- if you like. No more jobs to do. Like early tea?”

“I’ve never had it.”

“Well, why not begin? I’m rather mad on early morning tea. I’ll put it outside your door.”

“Why shouldn’t -- I ----?”

“Because I like getting up early. Not a virtue. I just like it.”

She sat up, and rising with her he kissed her on the forehead.

“Good night, Rachel. Good sleep and happy dreams.”

Returning to his chair and the fire he sat smoking and listening to the sound of her movements in the room above, and to him came the memory of one of those mediaeval romances in which the good knight slept with his sword beside him across his lady's door. Yes, perhaps that was all poppy-cock to most of the moderns, and yet William Wynter subscribed to the superstition that sacred love was more satisfying to the soul of man than pagan passion, and as he sat there he felt happier than he had ever felt before. There was no fear in this little house, but good faith, gentleness, and quiet breathing.

Not till all sounds had ceased above did he climb the stairs and collect from his spare room his bedding for the night. He arranged it on the sofa, undressed, and placing a candle in his watch on the floor beside him, slid into his improvised bed and blew out the candle. The fire was dying down, but still playing the game of light and shadow. A supreme silence prevailed, and presently a happy and ingenuous lover fell asleep.

IV

Miss Garbutt was busy at the telephone, much to the indignation of an operator who considered such persistent energy superfluous on a Christmas evening, and yet became sufficiently interested to listen in. Ingratitude, Ingratitude, Ingratitude, such was the main tenor of the lady's song.

She rang up the Lovells, and was answered by the doctor.

Was her niece at the Lovell house ?

She was not.

Then did Dr. Lovell realise that the girl was playing the wanton at

Carter's Orchard ?

And all that Dr. Lovell said was, " I should advise you not to slander an innocent girl."

She rang up Mr. Augustus Roper, a Mr. Roper who had dined solus, and mingled memories of the past with two glasses of port. Would Mr. Roper advise her ? A man named William Wynter had persuaded her niece to cohabit with him without marriage, and what were her moral and legal rights as the girl's guardian ? Mr. Roper, flushed with memories and wine administered a verbal slap.

" My advice to you, madam, on such a day as this -- is to take a large dose of bromide and go to bed."

Mouthing to herself that one word " Ingratitude ", she rang up two more acquaintances, and sedulously spread the scandal. Had her dear friend Mrs. So-and-So seen anything of Rachel Waters ? No. How deplorable ! Then she feared that her niece had gone shamelessly to live with that young fellow who owned Carter's Orchard.

Her final conversation had been with one of the Misses Merry.

Could the " George " provide her with dinner ?

The instant reply had been -- " Sorry, Full up."

And so was Miss Garbutt at the end of the evening.

V

The virtues of the English include tolerance, and a disinclination to make tragic noises and tear their hair when primitive emotions become active. There is more of comedy than tragedy in our make-up, and when Harrowfield discovered that both Rachel Waters and Eliza had abandoned "

Mon Repos " and left Miss Garbutt to seethe in solitude, it chuckled.

Boxing Day ! A very unpleasant old woman had had her ears boxed. As for the news that the niece had taken refuge with the Apple Man up at Carter's Orchard, Harrowfield was kinder to Rachel than to her aunt. Well, well, well, did not most young things experiment before marriage, and folly in love was more admirable than sousing yourself in vinegar. Moreover, when gossip began to get about it was debunked by two or three people who were held in high repute by Harrowfield. Dr. Lovell, being buttonholed by the vicar, and challenged to condemn what appeared to be a most reprehensible affair, became once more a member of an army Mess, and gave the good cleric pure candour.

" Rot. Those youngsters are to be married next week."

The vicar stuttered and was shocked.

" I have -- er -- not been -- advised."

" I -- have. Moreover, let me tell you that the girl was the victim of a dastardly piece of cruelty. I and my wife know both the children pretty well. Just Babes in the Wood. Good morning."

VI

Wynter was up before dawn, and busy with a countryman's chores. Both the parlour and kitchen grates had to be dealt with, cleaned out, laid and lit. Paths had been swept to the well and the privy in the back yard, but William made sure that the sanitary bucket was clean and empty, and paper to hand. With the kettle on and water in, he washed his hands after lighting the Primus, got out the early morning tea-set, and with great care and attention to business, cut bread and butter. Between whiles he

listened, but heard no sounds of stirring in the room above, and during one of these asides a spluttering kettle reproved him.

“ All right, all right, old fellah. No need to fuss.”

He made tea, and filling a cup for himself and putting a slice of bread and butter aside, he carried the small round tray up the stairs, using a torch to light himself up to the landing. He set the tray down and knocked.

“ Hullo, darling. Early tea.”

He heard a creaking of the bed.

“ Oh, Bill. I ought to have been up.”

“ No hurry. Sleep well ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ That’s good. No hurry.”

VI

Both fires were behaving well, and he sat in front of the kitchen range and drank his tea, and then lit a pipe. Jolly fun this, doing things for someone else, and such a someone else. Then he remembered that he had not cleared up his improvised bed on the couch, and he bundled the things up and carried them upstairs. It was light enough now for him to see without candle or torch.

Her voice appealed to him.

“ Oh, Bill, darling, could I have some hot water ? ”

“ Silly ass. I mean me. Of course. I’ll get it.”

“ And Bill ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I’ll cook breakfast. Have we any eggs ? ”

“ We have.”

“ I’ll do scrambled eggs.”

“ Splendid.”

The mention of eggs reminded him that there were the pullets to be opened up and fed. He filled her a can of hot water from the Primus, and carried it up the stairs, and then went out into a white world upon other jobs. A clear sky was crisp and blue, and his breath mingled with the smoke from his pipe. Water to be drawn from the well, dry kindling and coal to be brought in, the birds given their feed of corn. A cheerful robin followed him on these various jobs, and joined the pullets in picking up corn.

“ I say, old chap, that’s butting in.”

But Mr. Red-Breast had his breakfast, and with his pipe out Wynter knocked the ash from it on the heel of a boot, and went back to the cottage.

Rachel was down and busy in the kitchen, and never had a kitchen looked so good.

“ Hullo, darling.”

“ Hullo, Bill, dear.”

They kissed.

- 30 -

Rachel, waking on that late December morning, heard sounds that puzzled her, the steady drip of water, and an occasional slither of snow sliding from the eaves and falling with a thud on the ground below. One of those sudden and surprising thaws had set in, unpredicted by the experts, but heralded by a warm drift of wind from the west. The white world of Christmas was passing towards a drenched and sad new year, a year that was to see other passings and many metamorphoses, the coming of the starkly new, and the crumbling of much that was old.

A streak of grey light showed between the curtains, and slipping out of bed to greet a day that was to be memorable, she saw the orchard trees in all their wet blackness, and saucers of green grass where the drip of the thaw had helped it melt the snow. There was a mist in the valley, and grey murk upon the hills, and the sudden melancholy of this English scene chilled her for the moment.

Her mother ? She shivered. Would she ever be -- like that revolting picture ? And then she heard the sound of whistling, and footsteps on the stairs.

“Hullo, darling.”

“Oh, Bill.”

“Early morning tea.”

The impulse was instant. She ran to the door, opened it, and stood in her white night-dress, a figure of innocence and appeal.

“Oh, Bill, hold me a moment.”

He gave her one look, bent down, set the tray to one side, and took her to him.

“What is it, darling?”

“I’ve been frightened. You are not afraid of me, Bill?”

“Good God, no.”

He felt her trembling, and picking her up he carried her to the bed, laid her down, and drew the clothes over her.

“You’re cold, darling. Get warm and drink your tea. I’ve got the fire going.”

And suddenly she caught one of his hands and pressed it to her lips.

II

Wynter had an appointment with Mr. Augustus Roper at ten o’clock, and another with the manager of the local bank at eleven. Finance was something of a problem, his credit balance less than fifty pounds, and the only solution was the selling of a small holding of Government stock. Well, what of it? Rachel needed clothes, and she and Mrs. Lovell were to go on a shopping adventure together. Wynter took his bike and rode it through the slush, and his was no mood of melancholy, but one of tenderness and courage. He had held that trembling little body in his arms, and been profoundly moved by that gesture of hers. Should he fear anything in life with so much to be risked? Was not all life and love a challenge, and those who shirked the great adventure doomed to be the victim’s of their cowardice? His hands might be cold upon the handle-bars, but his heart knew neither fear nor heaviness. So, he came to Harrowfield hill, and at a certain place his front wheel skidded, and he found himself doing a balancing trick on one leg, with the windows of “Mon Repos” coldly observing him.

Was it an omen that his machine should try to spill him in this particular spot ? He swung his other leg clear of the bike, and stood confronting the house. Patches of snow still crusted the laurel hedge, and the polished leaves were wet and glistening with the thaw. A puddle had spread itself between the gate pillars. The blinds were down, giving the windows a glaring deadness, and no smoke rose from the squat chimneys. Was the place empty ? Somehow it reminded Wynter of a big feline creature in a zoo, caged and bored and mangy, and ignoring in its profound melancholy the fool faces of the humans who stood and stared.

He did not remount his bike, but wheeled it up the rest of the hill and past the grey abbey wall and the great yews and towering, lace-branched elms. If Miss Catharine Garbutt had left that most sinister house what other sinister significance might be associated with her passing ? Could the spirit of evil melt and turn to slush ? And did it matter ? He wheeled his bike into the little garden-forecourt of the proud red house, and leaving it against the railings, rang Mr. Roper's bell.

Mr. Roper was ready for him, and paternally so, and with a rosy face and a benignant eye. The cheerful fire in the old fashioned grate spread a human warmth that might have emanated from the old man's ruddy, jocund countenance. Yes, all the legalities were in order, and no interference could cloud a memorable day.

" I rang up the Registrar, William, and told him I should be with you."

" That's awfully good for you, sir."

" Not a bit. No complications to be expected. The Lovells will be with us."

" By the way, sir, I passed that house, and all the blinds were down."

Mr. Roper's black eyes twinkled.

"I rather believe the lady has vanished. Report has it that her cook-general left her in a hurry."

"Well, I don't wonder."

"Gone with the wind or the snow, William. By the way, I am giving the wedding lunch."

"You, sir?"

"Yes. Old gentlemen must be allowed to enjoy themselves. It will be at the 'Queens'. Everything arranged."

Wynter got up, and warmed his hands at the fire. He was feeling other warmth within him.

"Life and people are pretty good at times, sir. You are being kinder than you know."

III

No white ribbons decorated the hired car that carried them into Westings. They were alone together and holding hands, and sitting beside Mrs. Mary. And to William Wynter, a mere bridegroom in a lounge suit, recurred certain words that Mr. Roper had spoken.

"In the years that lie before us, William, there may be little left to us but kindness of one to another."

How did the old man know that? Were small children and old men sometimes fey? Strange that on one's marriage morning the brutalities and horrors of yesterday should suddenly crowd about your consciousness. What was this new world to be? A replica -- gigantically magnified -- of the Spanish War, struggles that were mere murder, poisoned minds, starvation, concentration camps, hunger and fear the incentives, all faith

in any Benign Otherness blown to shreds by bombs ? Had the old Sussex worthy felt the future in his bones ? Were conscience, and compassion, and faith to fade out of the world ? And man, left in a kind of new nakedness, might become the brute of the old stone age, wielding a flint axe and tearing his food uncooked with bloody fingers ? And would man, in his new material agony, starved and hungry and unbelieving, discover that the only hope lay in a new kindness, and a compassion that might bring Christ to earth again ?

He felt a sudden pressure on his fingers.

"What is -- it -- Bill, darling ?"

He turned and smiled at her.

"Just thoughts, Rachel. Some things come to one -- even at times like this."

"You looked so ----"

"Stern ?"

"Yes, as though ----"

He raised her hand to his lips.

"I think -- and know -- that all the cure for thinking -- or too much thinking, -- sits beside me -- you."

The car carried them into Trafalgar Square, an oblong of high Georgian houses, some grey stuccoed, some painted cream or chocolate, and in the centre of the square a statue of the Great Queen presided over hollies and laurels. William Wynter opened the near door, and gave a hand to this child bride. He had no need to ask her whether she was afraid, for her face floated beside him with a flower-like radiance, and her eyes were smiling. The Lovell car had drawn up behind them, and Mr. Roper, hat in hand, was holding the near door open for Mrs. Mary.

A dry-as-dust room, files, office furniture, and a mild little man with a bald and foetal head seated behind a desk. Mr. Roper and the Registrar shook hands, and formal introductions were conducted. William Wynter, standing as on parade beside his mate, was moved to wonder at the ingenuities and simplicities of man. No garlands or orange blossom here, no high ritual or music, but a flat little voice chirruping at them, and yet the mystic ritual could be sounding within you. Forms and ceremonies might be as mere dust on the highroad, if the live mystery was within you, and your love as inevitable as dawn and sunrise.

He was aware of little trivialities, simple human happenings, a half smoked pipe lying propped against the official inkstand, the sparse hair carefully arranged on the bald and official head, a girl clerk who had a cold, sniffing at a table in a corner. Nearer to him was Rachel's wedding hat, a piquant thing in black and cerise, and beneath it that soft and serious profile. He had the ring ready, and his momentary dread was that he might fumble and drop it. Then abruptly, the little sensitive nose in the profile beside him began to sniff. Had the wet wench in the corner provoked that moist echo, or was Rachel about to weep? He glanced at her anxiously. Did she need a handkerchief? He had a clean one. But could one produce such a thing at so serious a moment? She seemed to sense his concern, and gave him a sudden upward smile.

Then they were man and wife. Rachel was being kissed by Mrs. Mary, and Mr. Roper and the doctor were not to be outdone by the lady. Wynter was shaking hands with the Registrar while his left hand felt for his wallet and the official fee. A voice said playfully -- "Bill, aren't you going to kiss your wife?" Of course he was. The girl at the table in the corner began to sneeze.

IV

The Queen's hotel, large and grey and Victorian ; with its balconies and glass sun-lounge seemed to have its feet in a lustreless sea, and its chimneys in grey cloud. The two cars arrived in its forecourt, and the wedding party passed in through the revolving door. William and Rachel, finding themselves trapped and huddled in the same segment, arrived in the hotel lounge with laughing and self-conscious faces.

" Good omen, my dears," said Mr. Roper, " even glazed turnstiles can't separate you."

The gentlemen went to leave hats and coats in the cloakroom, the ladies to their own sanctum. Mr. Roper, whom the Queen's Hotel had known for thirty years, had arranged all details with the management, a reserved table in the lounge for sherry, and another table in the dining-room. The Christmas crowd had come and gone, and the big lounge was almost empty.

They were gathering round the table near a fire when that most unpredictable and startling apparition materialised. A large figure in black emerged from the lift, and stood looming within five yards of them. Miss Catharine Garbutt had taken refuge at the Queen's Hotel.

There had been lively conversation and it sank into sudden silence. Dr. Lovell and Mr. Roper exchanged quick glances, and Mrs. Mary made a sudden movement as though to put herself between Rachel and that must unwelcome ghost. Wynter stood dumb, his eyes on the face of his young wife, for Rachel was looking at Miss Garbutt, and Rachel's face had a curious sheen.

She moved suddenly round a chair, crossed the space that separated them from that solid, statuesque, bespectacled figure. Only Miss Garbutt could see her face, and it was soft and smiling. The watchers saw the incredible

thing happen, Mrs. William Wynter kissing her aunt, and Miss Garbutt appearing to be paralysed by that kiss. She remained static, massive, her large face utterly without expression. Then, suddenly she turned about and moving very slowly like a large long figure propelled by some mechanism, she re-entered the lift. A page clanged the gates to. The ghost of yesterday went heavenwards.

Rachel came back to them with a light in her eyes, and sat down beside Mrs. Mary as though nothing had happened. The conversation broke out again, but outwardly it was not concerned with Miss Kate Garbutt, though all the inward reactions were varied and various, if voiceless. Wynter, standing behind his young wife, looked down at her dark head, and knew that this girl-woman had done a blessed and a lovely thing. So too, Mary Lovell translated it into words -- "I am happy. I can forgive." All that she did was to lay a hand on Rachel's and keep it there for several seconds. Glasses had been filled by a waiter, and Mr. Roper, rising glass in hand, gave William Wynter's wife an old world bow. His ruddy and jocund face saluted her in silence. But he was saying to her inwardly -- "The kiss of peace, my dear. Never will you regret it."

V

Miss Garbutt had said in a harsh and half stifled voice to the small page -- "I have forgotten my handkerchief. Take me up to the third floor."

The child had stood with his back to her, innocent of any comprehension of the quest of forgotten handkerchiefs. When the lift reached the third floor he opened the iron gates for the lady, but he did not look up into her face. Miss Garbutt pushed past him and along the corridor to her room. It

was a dreary room, looking out upon the grey backs of other houses, chimneys, stack-pipes, the roofs of sheds. She locked the door. Her large and sallow face was strangely distorted. She put a hand to her mouth, and her teeth closed on the flesh of her first finger. For a moment or two she stood rigid, breathing heavily, eyes wide behind her spectacles. Then, she began to walk up and down, up and down, ponderously and with a suggestion of inward turmoil. She gulped, turned to a chest of drawers, opened the upper drawer in violent haste like a woman who was about to be sick and needed a handkerchief. She found one, pressed it to her mouth, gulped and burst into sudden tears.

Up and down, up and down, swaying slightly from side to side, and stumbling once or twice against the bed. What was happening within her ? Had that kiss set loose some flood of black ooze, the poisoned emotion of hate and cruelty and balked affection ? She gulped. She bit at the crumpled handkerchief. Had that forgiving kiss brought to her the realisation that in some perverted way she had grown to feel an affection for the creature whom she had persecuted ? Had the victim been somehow necessary to her, even as a drug may become necessary to some poor, decadent hedonist ?

- 31 -

Tom and William were winter-spraying, using the power-sprayer attached to the Motor Culto, and the chug-chug of the engine and the hiss of the vapour from the lance combined in a melody that was novel to these ancient trees. The day was calm and still, just the day for the job in hand, with no frost threatening ; and the sky, a pellucid blue. Mrs. William Wynter had gone shopping in Harrowfield, and she had become very much Mrs. Wynter in the shops, and likeably so. Mr. Butcher, Mr. Baker, and Mr. Grocer displayed a quite paternal interest in her needs and finances, for Harrowfield had decided to take these two young things to its heart. Their marriage had been quite a romantic affair. St. George had rescued the lady and driven the Dragon to blazes.

Said Tom to his master -- " I reckon these 'ere ol' trees must wonder what be happening, 'avin' their heads washed for the first time like a lot of ol' women."

" Didn't Carter spray ? "

" No, ssir. Obstinate fellah. Didn't 'old with it."

Wynter moved the machine to the next tree. He had heard a blackbird singing that morning, and it had brought the Spring nearer.

" If they don't fruit, Tom, this year, I shall be in Queer Street."

" Don't you worry, ssir. I 'ave a sort of feelin' that we be goin' to see somethin' on these trees."

Rachel, coming to the orchard gate with a basket in one hand, and a shopping bag in the other, set her loads down and surveyed the scene. She had news for William, strange news, but for the moment it could wait ; moreover her arms were aching, for it was a longish climb from the valley.

Her little face was prettily flushed and happy, and the silver spray over yonder with the winter sunlight shining through it was like a prophetic flower. It moved her to utter an inward prayer -- "Oh, do give him apples, bushels and bushels of apples, you dear old trees."

Her husband, working round a massive veteran, saw her and passed the lance to Tom.

"Give the trunk a go, Tom."

"I will, ssir."

Old Tom turned the spray on the crusted trunk, and took a look at William Wynter striding in his loose, long-legged way towards the gate. Lord love a duck, they were in love -- these two, and God bless 'em. Rachel, her hands on the upper bar of the gate, and with the sunlight in smiling eyes, gazed at the figure of her man and loved him for everything that he did, the way he walked, the way he looked at her, the way he carried his head.

"I say, darling, did you hump all that up here?"

She nodded.

"I've done quite well, Bill."

"Let's look. I say, potatoes. You oughtn't to carry all that."

"I managed."

"I'll go down next time."

He picked up her basket and her bag, but she lingered there, her eyes on the landscape.

"Oh, Bill."

"Yes?"

"Something to tell you. What do you think?"

"Sometimes I feel more than I think. Well, what's the excitement?"

"There's a furniture van outside -- the -- house."

Wynter's face sharpened.

" Her house ? "

" Yes. She must be leaving."

" Is that so ? Well ---- "

She closed the gate, and linked an arm around his.

" Poor old thing. She must be very lonely."

Her husband gave her a swift, downward glance.

" By God, you have a lovely nature."

II

The out-door work was over for the day, and William was strolling back from giving the pullets their last feed of corn, when he saw a green van stationary outside the orchard gate. A man was balancing a trunk on his shoulder, young Perks the carrier, a young Perks who drove a motor van in place of the old horsed vehicle of his father, and young Perks' manners were like his name, modern and perky. He came across the orchard, carrying the trunk with an air of jauntiness. He grinned at William Wynter.

" Something for the missus. And -- paid for. You're in luck."

" Who sent it ? "

" The old woman your gal used to live with."

Yes, Percy Perks was ultra-modern and would soon be saying By-By to all and sundry. " Sez you, " was already in his phrase book, and he could add, " Give me a twinkle, brother, if you want me any time." But Wynter was more interested in the trunk than in this democratic Breezy Bertie. What the devil ---- ? Had Miss Catharine Garbutt made some other sinister

presentation, or was this the product of a kiss ?

“ You can put it down. I’ll take it in.”

Mr. Perks plumped the trunk down on the turf, and looked at Wynter as though he doubted his capacity to carry it.

“ Bit solid, brother.”

Wynter ignored him, save replying with a curt, “ All right, and thanks.” Mr. Percy Perks might be an excellent fellow, but a little raw and matey in his approach to life. But Percy Perks’ van had yet another article to disgorge.

“ ‘Alf a mo. I’ve got your girl’s bike.”

Wynter gave him a frosty look. Why not the lady or Mrs. Wynter ? Why flap familiarity like a greasy dishcloth in everybody’s face ?

“ All right, Mr. Perks. Put it inside the gate.”

Mr. Perks had the last word.

“ Got something out of the old woman, haven’t yer, anyway.”

Wynter picked up the trunk and shouldered it with an ease that surprised the van-man. Before the Spanish War he had enjoyed a lean strength, and hard labour had toughened and added to it. He marched off with the trunk, carrying more than Mr. Perks suspected, and Mr. Perks was peeved. A bloody toff should not be capable of dealing with the thing as capably as he could.

Wynter deposited the trunk in the porch, and went back for the bicycle which Mr. Perks had placed against the hedge. He had left the gate open, and was back in the driving-seat.

“ Nighty-night, brother.”

Wynter did not reply. He closed the gate and wheeled the bicycle towards the cottage.

The winter dusk was spreading swiftly as though a curtain was being drawn across the sky, and Wynter saw the parlour window come to life, its diamond lattices patterned against the light. Wynter left the trunk lying, stepped aside and put his face close to the window. He saw his wife laying the table for tea, and wearing a flowery apron which made him think of a French or Spanish girl. Her white hands fluttered over the polished oak, for Rachel was house-proud and the gate-legged table had responded with a sheen that was like a smile. Also, he heard a happy murmuring as she hummed some song. Women could have lovely faces and unlovely natures, but William Wynter could feel himself blessed with both.

He opened the porch door and carried the trunk in, and hearing him, his wife came to meet him. He had a glimpse of her standing in the parlour doorway, staring wide-eyed at the thing he carried. Her mouth was mute.

“Something for you, darling. The carrier fellow left it.”

She stepped aside, and he had a feeling that she was frightened.

“There’s your bike too. Maybe it is a peace offering.”

He set the trunk down on the hearthrug.

“Better open it, Rachel.”

She stood looking down at the thing as though it might contain some malicious secret.

“I’d rather not. You open it, Bill.”

He bent down, and unfastened the hasp and catches, for the trunk was not locked. He lifted the lid, and saw a sheet of paper lying on a neatly folded coat. He picked it up and held it to the light.

“With Aunt Kate’s good wishes.”

He passed it to Rachel, and lifting out the coat, unfolded it and held it at arm’s length.

"Your fur coat, darling."

"Oh, Bill ---- !"

"Remember the old saying ? Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. The kiss of peace, my dear."

She stood gazing at the coat.

"Oh, Bill, I wish ----"

"She hadn't sent it ?"

"No, that I could feel -- sure ----"

He understood her. Did that black trunk contain some hidden menace ? He kneeled down, and with deliberate hands unpacked it and laid its contents on the hearthrug, two frocks, undies, stockings, shoes, etc.

"Just what was yours, darling."

He looked up at her smilingly.

"Just like an old story book. Someone's heart may have been -- touched."

III

Nothing can look more wintry than winter, which is a trite and obvious way of saying that when a human heart is soused in melancholy, the world seems greyer than reality. Rachel and William may have wondered about Miss Catharine Garbutt, and Rachel, with her fluttering conscience, wrote a letter and posted it to the Queen's Hotel at Westings. Her aunt might still be there. She -- was -- there, very much there, and becoming one of those Chronics whom hotel managers may have cause to mistrust, but Miss Garbutt was neither sociable nor a gossip. She was not popular with the staff, and maybe she was beginning to be unpopular with herself. What of each day ? Getting up, breakfasting alone at a table in a corner, half an

hour with the morning paper, a walk by the sea, an unfriendly and impersonal sea. Perhaps an hour in a glass shelter, where others of the superfluous old glanced at her and refrained from conversation. Westings was full of old people who were finished, and who prevaricated over the inevitable finale. Grim old women, poor desiccated and lonely creatures who sometimes looked like perambulating mummies. Shops. But what pique was there in shops? You seemed to see in them the empty provocations of a sterile self. Books? Books about emotions and happenings that had passed out of your life? Little drinks alone in the lounge, glasses of sherry, a gin and bitters, port, strong spirit? A whisky bottle appeared upon Miss Garbutt's table. Yet another bottle came to be locked up in her wardrobe.

She carried in her bag that letter from Rachel.

Dear Aunt --

How thoughtful and generous of you
to send me all those things.

They will be such a great help.

I am so happy here. William is so good to me.

We are beginning to get excited about the spring.

Rachel

That letter had caused Miss Garbutt strange and unexpected qualms. Happiness, youth, someone being good to you, excitement about the Spring. All these realities had passed out of Miss Garbutt's world. Her furniture was in store, and she in cold storage, alone and unwanted. Had she been utterly realist she could have said that she was a miserable old woman seeking inward warmth from gin and whisky.

IV

At Carter's Orchard the old trees had been put into white smoke, which caused certain of the Know-Alls to jeer. No one lime-washed fruit trees in these enlightened days, and turned an orchard into a crowd of drunken old women in their night gear. Tom Lavender, that shrewd patriarch, having scraped scores of crusted tree trunks with a blunt old kitchen knife, and discovered strange beasts and pockets of eggs there, could chuckle at the Know-Alls. Silly breed of prigs. If you limed the inside of a hen-house why not the trunk of an apple tree? As Tom saw it -- the whole trouble came from lads having too much schooling, and getting above using their legs and their hands. Who was going to do the real jobs that mattered when all lads wanted to wear white collars and black coats and stripy trousers, and ride in trains and buses, and sit all day scribbling, or playing the amateur gent behind a counter?

Tom might have had the gift of prophecy.

"This 'ere ol' country's goin' to get a shock some day. All them towns shoutin' for potatoes, and not enough chaps to grow 'em. Too proud to do an honest day's work, or to soil their silky 'ands. What! You don't believe in fear, ssir? Why, dang it, most chaps wouldn't work if they weren't afraid of losin' their dinner and their mug of beer, and their smokes."

Wynter, who in theory dreamed of eliminating fear from the world, had to accept Tom's realism. Had he not known fear in its most crude and devastating form? Was not fear energising him even in this peaceful place, fear of failure, of the lack of hard cash, fear of privation and shabby poverty for the girl he had married? Absolutely so. Moreover, there was fear in the air for those who had some sensitive fore-feeling,

and who -- like beasts and birds -- could by instinct foretell a coming storm. This interlude of peace might be no more than a breathing space. Rabbits come out to feed in broad daylight when rain threatens. And Wynter was to witness the amazing stimulus fear could exert upon a nation -- Dunkirk. England was to sweat blood in labour because fear had twisted its easy-osy guts.

Then -- fear of the freaks of nature, early frosts, pests, marauding finches stripping flower buds. Fear of rabbits gnawing the bark of your young trees. Surely he had become more and more primeval man in this Sussex orchard, and could understand primal man's fear of the mysterious happenings of Nature which could manifest as the anger of malice of a God or strange devils who had to be propitiated. The country man had to find an answer to these questions and science and his own cunning were helping with the problems. But what of Urban Man? He had become dissociated from these elemental things. He expected his food to arrive punctually upon his plate, while knowing little or nothing of the labour and the cunning that produced it. What if that plate became empty, forty million or so plates?

Yes, there was something in old Tom's logic. The world's future might lie on the land. And fear would put Adam back on the soil. Eden was the dream of political fools, and Pharisaical fanatics.

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Rachel, happier than she had ever been before, yet sensed in her husband the stress of unconfessed anxiety. He was working at high pressure, turning up more land and doing it with spade labour, bastard trenching with the turf chopped up and buried under the top spit. He came in very tired, and with a tiredness that tried to hide itself behind a brittle cheerfulness, and Rachel was troubled.

Was he unhappy, or just worried about something, and if he was troubled why was she not sharing it? There were evenings when he would sit at the oak bureau in the corner, with a lighted candle beside him, and scribble and pour over papers. He did not lock the flap of the bureau, and it could be explored if she chose to do so. Weekly he handed out to her the money for the weekly bills, plus pin money for herself, and once when the week's cash had failed to cover their expenses he had looked bothered.

Was he worried about money? Was she spending too much? And was he too generous to tell her so?

She had lit the lamp and he had come in to wash in the scullery, after taking off his soil stained boots. She had tea ready, and he sat down opposite her with an air of tired remoteness.

She passed him his cup.

"Bill. I want you to tell me something."

He looked at her quickly.

"What, darling?"

"If -- things are difficult, Bill, I can do without my pocket money."

He set his cup down, stirred it consideringly as though making up his mind upon some matter. He had never talked to her of money, perhaps

because he had not wished their earlier days to suffer any tarnish, or for any shadow to cover her happy and loving little face. Her happiness had been his, and he had concealed from her, or thought he had, anxieties and secret forebodings. What had she known of money save the lack of it ?

He looked at her with a sudden smile, but her eyes were not the mere eyes of a child. A woman sat opposite him, a woman who asked to share in his problems and his worries.

“ I can cut my tobacco, darling, if it comes to that.”

Her face was serious.

“ Bill, I ought to know. I want to help.”

“ Well, you see, darling, I bought this old place as a kind of adventure and a help to sanity. I could grub along and cut expenses ---- ”

“ And then -- I came ! ”

Her cry was so self-accusing that he got up, came round the table and kissed her.

“ Best thing that ever happened here. Do you want to know how we stand ? ”

“ Of course I do, Bill.”

He went back to his chair.

“ I think you're right. I didn't want to bring any sort of shadow into this place.”

Then she said one of those wise things that can come from the lips of the young.

“ There must be some shadow, Bill -- life isn't all glare.”

He gave her a long and steadfast look.

“ How well I have done for myself. All right, let's come down to earth.”

Very simply he explained their situation. He had had to spend capital

in buying and equipping Carter's Orchard. Did she know what capital was ? She nodded. Well, there were old Tom's wages to be paid, and current expenses met, and as yet no returns were accruing from the soil. They were having to live on a small income that came to them from the money he had inherited.

He had finished, and then he was touched by the trivial little incident. He saw her reach for the jam-jar, hesitate and then return it to its saucer. Economy and self-restraint. Again he left his chair, and picking up the jar spooned a generous helping on to her plate.

" Can't have that, darling."

" But, Bill ---- "

" Look here, my sweet, I'd rather you had my share, if it comes to that."

" I couldn't. But Bill, if we have vegetables and fruit and eggs we ought to be able to live quite cheaply. I don't need meat, and so the butcher's bill ---- "

And suddenly he laughed as though quick emotion had to find expression in laughter.

" Darling, it's not as bad as that. Do you think I am going to let you starve yourself? We just have to be careful."

" Yes, Bill, I'll be very careful. And later on -- couldn't I help in the orchard ? I could pick fruit and weed, and do all sorts of things."

" We'll see about that. Your present job is to eat that jam."

II

March and the crocusses bloom. Rachel had planted two dozen corms in the small front garden, and there were just fourteen flowers, seven yellow

and seven purple, and she had counted them with loving care. Thank heaven there were not thirteen, or she might have to murder one of the poor blossoms. Catkins were golden on the nut trees, for old Carter had planted a row of Filberts. Growth was in the air, and early potatoes disappearing into their drills. Wynter would go round daily scanning his apple trees and almost counting those innumerable and previous fruit-spurs. They were clean and glistening, far more clean than a year ago. Their period of peril was very near. Avaunt - spring frosts and parasites ! If that orchard gave him but fifty pounds worth of fruit, the margin could be bridged.

Birds were coming into song, and Wynter was the first to hear the daybreak chorus. He was a lighter sleeper than his wife, and sometimes he would wake with one of her arms across him, and he would lie still and listen to her breathing and to birds. Blackbirds most of them, lovely in song, but with an insatiable passion for fruit, and so different from the thrush which left your fruit unpecked and concentrated upon your snails. Even in the days to come William Wynter could never quite bring himself to be ruthless to these black coated, orange-billed thieves.

He kept his watch on a bedside table, and was able to reach for it without waking Rachel, and since they slept with the curtains undrawn, he could read the time. Six o'clock was their hour, and getting up was good. So many jolly things to do, for the weariness of the post-war disillusionment would never be theirs.

At six, if Rachel was still sleeping, he would wake her with a kiss, and for a second or two she would cling to him.

"Happy day, darling. My turn to light the fire."

"No, mine."

"Well, here goes," and he would kiss her again, and scramble out of bed to shave and wash and dress in their half finished spare room. A woman's getting up was a rather more intimate and delicate business. The perfect husband should grow wise as to that.

Wynter kept an almanac hung up in the parlour, and with a kind of boyish gusto he ticked off each day. Six weeks or so to go yet before the orchard would be in full flower and setting fruit. Wynter had marked May 15 with a circle of red ink, for that date was -- according to old Tom -- the end of the period when a late frost could do damage. Fox Farm possessed an old mulberry tree and Tom would say that when a mulberry began to show green leaves the danger of frost was past. But there might be weevils and winter moth, and William and Tom cleaned and re-greased all the safety bands. The old trees were set with polished fruit buds, clean and healthy, and March winds had dried the new ground, and the clods were ripe for knocking into a useful tilth.

The cottage did not possess a wireless set, and William and Rachel did not hear the news that shocked the world. It was Tom who brought the tidings next morning.

"That there chap -- Hitler's done it again."

"What, Tom?"

"Marched into that place called Prague."

"No. It can't be true."

"It was on the news, ssir."

"God!" said Wynter, "These Germans are going to ruin the whole world."

He went in to breakfast with a set of frozen face. All the old fear seemed to be flooding back into Europe. Rachel, quick to sense anything that had disturbed him, gave him one glance and was silent. If a man could

understand a woman wanting to dress alone and in peace, she might comprehend the silliness of blurting out questions. How did Rachel know that the woman who asks no questions receives the unsolicited answer ?

“ Bad news, I’m afraid, darling.”

Had rabbits been gnawing the young trees ?

“ The Germans are in Prague.”

She was pouring out his tea, and the news did not cause her qualms. Prague was far away, and how could its tragedy affect a cottage in Sussex ?

“ Is it really serious, Bill ? ”

He looked at her with a sudden twitching smile.

“ Afraid so, darling. It means war.”

“ War ? ”

“ Yes, sooner or later. No more Munich. I used to hope that Hitler was bluffing. He has bluffed us up to now, but this is the grand finale. Appeasement is dead. Poor old Chamberlain.”

But she could not see it as he -- man -- saw it, or at least -- not yet. She did not divine his feeling of involvement, he a young man who had seen what war could be, and might dread the turmoil of conscience and the call to serve. War, conscription, this happy corner of the earth to be abandoned, a young wife left alone. Fear had returned to him, a fear that was doubled by the nearness of that gentle little face.

III

In the more acute phase of his mental sickness Wynter had suffered from night terrors. He would dream that he was buried, and suffocating, and struggling to scrabble himself out of his bomb-grave. For two years or

more he had been free from this nightmare of memory, and the horrors and poignancy of it had passed.

It happened some three days after the occupation of Prague. He had been conscious of acute tension, fear like some knotted pain in his bowels, and he had worked with a feverishness that had exhausted him and could not last. Old Tom had been watching him with dumb concern, for the master had shown an irritability that was new to him, while knocking the clodded Sussex soil to pieces as though hammering the heads of swarming snakes.

Wynter had kept at it until dusk, and then had flung his tools into the shed, and walked unsteadily, like a man exhausted at the end of a forced march. He had caught a toe on the brick step and stumbled against the yard door, and cursed it.

"God blast you."

Rachel, busy with the kettle had heard him, and her wide eyes and frightened face sobered him.

"Sorry, darling. I'm a bit tired. It makes you a clumsy idiot."

"You're doing too much, Bill."

"Well, let's have tea. Sorry I swore like that."

But that night she was shocked into sudden wakefulness by the man beside her. He was shouting, struggling, tossing the clothes off in a nightmare dream. Her own sudden terror was transmuted into tenderness. Sitting up in bed she tried to catch his clawing hands, and in the struggle her struck her in the face.

She winced for the moment, but caught and held his hands.

"Bill -- Bill, wake up, darling."

He came back to consciousness, and sat up, shivering.

"Where am I?"

" Here, darling, with me."

She had her arms round him, and she held him fast.

" You've had a bad dream, Bill."

" Oh, my God ! "

He was shaking, and she drew his head to her, and held him close as though to soothe and warm him, and presently the terror passed.

" Sorry, Rachel. I was dreaming. Must have scared you."

" Lie down -- and get warm. I'll make some tea."

" Stay just a moment."

She held his head against her bosom.

" Yes, I will. You're with me, Bill."

" Oh, thank God."

When he had calmed down she slipped out of bed, lit the candle and put on her dressing-gown and went down stairs. Her lower lip was bleeding, but she was not aware of it. The fire was out, but she lit the oil stove, boiled the kettle and made tea. With the candle in one hand and the cup in the other she climbed the stairs to find him sitting up in bed.

He stared at her.

" Rachel, your lip is bleeding."

" Is it, Bill ? "

" How ---- ? "

" You were struggling, darling."

He put out his hands to her.

" My God, that I should have done that ! "

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Dr. Lovell had finished dealing with the evening surgery patients, and Miss Creeth Jones, his secretary dispenser, was busy with books and official forms when the surgery bell rang. Lovell frowned as he stood at the high desk. The winter work had tired him to touchiness.

" See who it is, Miss Jones."

Miss Jones was one of those bright young women with an aquiline nose, a throaty voice, and pale blue eyes that saw everything and nothing. Her smile was without humour. In fact she might have posed for a pale Britannia, a somewhat static and negative creature, who, in the days to come was to find herself as an official person with a passion for saying No. She passed down the passage to the surgery door, to find Mr. William Wynter waiting and looking at the sunset.

" Yes, can I help you ? "

" Is the doctor in ? "

" Yes, but I'm afraid he is engaged at the moment. Have you an appointment ? "

" No."

" Shall I arrange one for you ? "

Miss Creeth Jones as an obstructionist was worth a considerable salary, and her favourite remark was " Can I help you ? " was mere cheese on a mouse-trap. Dr. Lovell had to be protected. He was a very tired man. But Miss Creeth Jones, having no children to chasten and servants to order about, and being full of bright energy, had to work it off in exercising brisk authority. She liked authority, and in the future she would enjoy herself in discovering every sort of reason why this or that should not be

done.

Wynter showed signs of restiveness. Miss Creeth Jones was not his type.

"I can come in and wait."

In fact he took off his hat and made a slight movement towards the door, but Miss Jones played Britannia.

"I had better ask the doctor. What name, please?"

She knew his name, but the assumption of bland ignorance could crown her like a helmet.

Dr. Lovell, overhearing the distant argument, and being somewhat mistrustful of Miss Creeth Jones' discretion, turned into the passage and recognised the man at the door.

"Hullo, William. Come in."

Wynter and the lady gave each other a hostile look, and Miss Creeth Jones, balked as an obstructionist, clattered back into the surgery. Mary Lovell had described her aptly as a good sort of girl who might adorn the local Post Office. Lovell took Wynter into the consulting-room, and lit the gas fire. He had been careful to close the communicating door, and when Wynter had uttered his first words, the doctor recrossed the room and turned the key. Miss Creeth Jones had a way of bursting in upon you just when she was not wanted.

"I want you to be father confessor, sir."

"Sit down, William. Smoke."

"I am just a filthy coward, sir. An attack of the old trouble. May I get it off my chest?"

Lovell gave him a diagnostic look, and took a pipe from the rack on the mantelpiece.

"A recurrence. Go ahead, William. Talking things out sometimes helps."

Wynter appeared to be in no mood for lighting pipes or sitting on chairs. He walked up and down, paused here, paused there, perched for a second or two on the edge of the doctor's desk, and was off again while blurting out his confession. War was coming, and what could be expected of a man who was young and physically fit? Active service. And he could not face up to it. One dose of modern warfare had robbed him of the illusion of courage. Moreover, he was knee-deep in the peace and productivity of his new little world, and he had found the one creature who could make life sweet and good for him. Lovell had filled and lit his pipe, and he allowed his patient to pour out his heart as he pleased. The sooner this confessional business was over, the sooner old breakages might be mended.

"I shouldn't worry too much, Bill, war isn't with us yet, and even if it comes you will be doing an essential job."

"Shall I feel like that, sir?"

"Look here, my lad, if it her necessary I would sign you up -- as ----"

"A poor funk."

"No, no, no. Nothing of the sort. You have had a mental wound, and such things are actual. You will be an efficient fruit producer, and you wouldn't be -- or might not be ---- Well, you know what I mean."

Wynter stood glowering at the fire.

"You must despise me, sir."

"Rot, my dear lad," and Lovell laid a hand on Wynter's shoulder, "I've seen war and I know the realities. It is just common sense to keep a man where he can give the best that is in him."

Wynter turned his head with a sudden smile.

"I don't want to be a profiteer. I'd give the best that is mine."

"I know that. Light your pipe, and smoke the worry out of you. And don't

overdo it.”

“ Tobacco ? ”

“ No, work. You have a damned, hypersensitive conscience. I have met that sort of disease before.”

Wynter felt in his pocket for his pipe.

“ Thank you. Somehow, I couldn't bear to think of leaving Rachel all alone. It would mean ---- ”

“ Just so, and your job is Carter's Orchard.”

II

The afterglow was shining upon the faces of the old houses and gilding the Abbey Gate when Wynter got on his bike and rode for home. The tops of the great elm trees by the church wore amber lace. As he passed “ Mon Repos ” he saw lights in the windows, for the house had a new tenant. There was a faint mist rising in the trough of the valley, but as Wynter climbed the further hill the air was clear and the western sky brilliant. There might be a light frost, but fruit buds were not opening yet. He pedalled hard, like a man who had been given a new urge and fresh will to spend himself. So, he came to the white gate of Carter's Orchard, dismounted, opened the gate, and wheeled his bike through on to the dew wet grass. The old trees seemed to reach out and stretch consoling hands over him.

Oh, blessed trees and peaceful scene, a light in the window of his home, and a comrade waiting.

She was there in the porch, a little anxious, and hungry for what he might say to her, for there had been no secret between them.

She raised an arm.

" Bill, I've kept tea for you."

He left his bike against the fence, went in, and took her with an almost fierce tenderness into his arms.

" It's all right, darling. He says my job would be to stay here."

" Oh, Bill, I hoped he would say that."

" I was coward enough to hope he would."

" You are not a coward, darling. And -- I -- I couldn't let you go. Oh, Bill, kiss me."

III

Did the old trees laugh at them ? If they did, their laughter was delayed and retained for a particular occasion. March winds and waving branches, hands that swayed as though blessing the green grass and the sunlight. Were they not gay in their new white smocks, and Adam and Eve were always busy about them. Adam had spent much time with a notebook while he had studied the strange fauna that got gummed upon those sticky girdles, and it was a curious collection not listed in the text books.

Buff coloured moths, Winter Moth wingless females, flies, a tiny green creature that looked like a species of aphid, fragile tenuous-legged spiders, a black snake-like beast cleared away, and the bands refreshed, and Wynter was on the watch for Apple Blossom weevil.

Old Tom too was interested in these catches. In Carter's day the trees had been infested with Winter, March and Codlin Moth, and half the apples had come down as infected wind-falls. Maybe these sticky girdles would make a devil of a difference, and Tom was in one of his prophetic moods. The fantastic quality of this old countryman's forecasts manifested in their

unjustified correctness. Many world-wise gentlemen were asserting that there would be no war, and here was this Sussex yokel, who might never have heard of the Foreign Office, prognosticating war, and rationing and food shortages. This damned old island was going to be up against it.

"Why don't 'ee grow tomaters, ssir?"

"Tomatoes, Tom? We've got no glass."

"Grow 'em out of doors. Maybe that Hitler chap won't leave much glass left round about London."

"But raising them?"

"I could do that in my small house. Got a lamp and paraffin. I've done it before."

"It's an idea, Tom."

"And them filberts; there'll be money in them nuts. I reckon we shan't be getting' Brazils, and them there French walnuts comin' in."

"You're full of ideas, Tom."

"We bumkins aren't quite the fools, ssir, them there townnees think us. Coo -- we may 'ave the laugh of 'em, and we shan't go on silly strikes. Not we."

Tom, like some old shepherd, was weather wise, but this Spring's local climate vagaries were to have the laugh of him, and yet let him laugh. March out, April in, with buds swelling rather too early for Tom's liking. Yes, green bud stage ten days before you could count on it.

"I do 'ear that them Germans had a cure for frosts."

"Yes, a smoke smudge, Tom. You know our people have tried stoves."

"Don't 'old with 'em, ssir."

"You don't?"

"No, I don't. Getting' you up at all hours in the night. Besides -- think

what they'd cost ee."

"Quite so. Couldn't afford it at present. But we can't light bonfires all over the place. Have to trust to our luck, Tom."

"That be about it, ssir. One thing, we be'n't in a darned frost-hole."

April ended with windy gusto, westerly winds, and Tom blessed them, but with May came clear skies and cold and brilliant nights. The old trees were pink-budding with a promise of amazing splendour. Wynter had a thermometer hung on a post in the orchard and his last job at night and his first care in the morning was to take a reading of the minimum temperature and set the needles with a magnet. His ticking off of the days on the calendar hung in the parlour was bringing them very near to zero hour.

Rachel's daily prayer was -- "Oh, God, let there be no frost."

Delightful innocence, but Rachel did believe in a God, she did not know how or why.

Old Tom was more anxious than he would allow. May was in its mood of brilliant days and cold clear nights. Coo -- what a malicious month May could be, smile your trees into full flower by day, and frizzle them at night. Tom asked for cloud and a west wind, and no blanket of fog in the valleys, and grass that was not silver-bright when you looked out first thing in the morning. He walked over to have a look at the Fox Farm mulberry, and the tree was tufted with green shoots. That was reassuring, but Tom Lavender had his doubts. And how those Pub know-alls would chuckle if the toff's orchard got badly frosted.

Lovell, driving that way one May morning, saw a sight such as he had rarely seen in all his experience, the old orchard in full flower. So magnificent was it that he stopped his car and got out. The trees were like pavilions of snow flecked with rose. It was still and windless, and over

yonder he saw Bill Wynter earthing up early potatoes.

“Hullo, Bill.”

“Hullo, sir.”

“By George, my lad, I have passed this orchard many times but I have never seen it in such flower.”

“Haven’t you, sir?”

“No. All the work you have done seems to have put it in fine fettle.”

Wynter stood looking at his trees.

“It’s rather amazing, sir, how one tree can carry so much blossom.”

The doctor did not mention frosts. All this loveliness seemed sufficient on such a morning.

“Not worrying again, Bill?”

“Not about that, sir.”

Lovell understood, and he nodded.

“Remember you are on a hill, my lad. Hill-tops are good in more ways than one. How’s Rachel?”

“I think she is making it washing day.”

“A sacred day, Bill, when it is impious to disturb.”

It so happened that the doctor found a lean and sleazy fellow waiting for him at the orchard gate. The man had one of those mean dark faces that seem set in a perpetual sneer.

“Been chasin’ you all over the place, doctor. You were wrong about my missus. Nurse says you be wanted.”

“Is that so, Badger. Are you ever wrong about anything?”

The man poked a thumb at the orchard.

“Not often, mister. If that bloke thinks ‘e’s going to get apples, I don’t.”

Lovell gave him one of his cheerful smiles.

“ And wouldn't you be pleased, Badger ? Well, I have an idea that -- for once -- you are going to be wrong.”

The doctor was right and Mr. Badger wrong. Carter's Orchard was in full flower, and such was its floweriness that its white cap could be seen from Harrowfield. And on the 10th of May there was a most devastating frost, and nearly every garden in the neighbourhood had its blossom scorched brown. Wynter, going out early with a tense and anxious face, walked to the post where the thermometer hung, and compelled himself to look at it. The minimum reading was 33 degrees. Almost he threw his hat in the air, and a minute later Rachel heard him calling.

“ Darling, we've missed it.”

“ What, Bill ? ”

“ The frost.”

They had, and so had the mulberry tree at Fox Farm. Down in the valley and even in Harrowfield itself young plums and cherries were blackened, and the apple blossom withered and the stamens and stigmas dead. Strawberries were black-eyed, and the more exposed young berries on the gooseberries turning yellow. Disgruntled gardeners could see the soil littered with fallen fruitlets.

Tom Lavender chuckled.

“ That there old mulberry was right after all, ssir. Reckon there'll be a fruit famine round about. Good for us.”

“ It sounds damned selfish, Tom, but ---- ”

“ We've got the laugh of them Know-Alls. Maybe they'll come cringin' to us for apple pie.”

That was the last of the frosts, and but for a few browned blossoms Carter's Orchard continued in glory. William and Rachel watched the

petals fall, and the grass whitened as though it had been snowing.

“ Will it be all right, Bill ? ”

“ Tom thinks so. We shall have to wait a bit, of course. But you are going to have apples, darling. You know I have a feeling that you have brought me luck, yes, in more ways than one.”

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Jubilant, and then a surprising visitor. William Wynter was sowing a row of late peas. The broad beans were in flower and smelling sweet, when he saw a closed car pull up at the orchard gate. The driver got down to open the near door, and from it emerged a figure in black, Miss Catharine Garbutt.

Wynter straightened with half a dozen unsown peas in his hand. What the devil? Miss Garbutt was passing in through the gate, and its white bars contrasted with the blackness of that sinister figure. But was it sinister? Wynter dropped the peas into the seed bag, and went to meet the crisis, if crisis it had to be. He raised his hat to the lady.

“ Good morning, Miss Garbutt.”

And then he realised that there was some transformation here. Miss Garbutt's face was less sallow and static, and also faintly flushed. She smiled. Her spectacles glimmered.

“ Good morning, Mr. Wynter. I thought I would have a little drive, and pay you a visit.”

Wynter was guardedly polite. Miss Garbutt extended a hand, and he accepted it, and found it warm and moist. Something about her puzzled him. She had more animation, and suggested warm adiposity instead of frozen fat. Even her walk had more bounce and jollity, though what inspired it was beyond him.

“ How peaceful and green, Mr. Wynter. And how is Rachel ? ”

Rachel was well, and he hoped and believed happy. But what a conundrum was this! Had Miss Garbutt forgotten her previous visit and its shouting hysteria? People did not forget such things. Then, either she had

suffered a change of heart, or had conceived a more subtle shade of malice. But, after all, what could she do ? And her one gesture since the marriage had been kindly.

“ Yes, we are very peaceful up here.”

“ Isn’t the cottage charming.”

Charm was a word he had never associated with the lady.

“ Yes, just a little primitive, but after all people lived that way for centuries.”

“ I have not heard her grumble.”

They were nearing the cottage gate, and Miss Garbutt paused, and gave him a superabundant smile.

“ I think I ought to call you William. Mr. Wynter is so formal.”

He opened the gate for her.

“ Well, let it be William, Miss Garbutt.”

He was wondering how Rachel would react to the invasion. The porch door was open, and he called to his wife, and while standing close to her aunt he became aware of the provocative odour. For a moment it puzzled him, though it associated itself with certain places and particular people. The saloon of the “ George ” Inn, and one or two of its habitués ?

“ Rachel ---- ”

She was in the kitchen, and Wynter saw her come into the narrow passage, wearing an apron, and her hands white with pastry making. She stood very still, wide of eye, her face suddenly white like her hands. Her dumbness appeared to stimulate Miss Garbutt, and she emitted a sound like a giggle.

“ Well, my dear, this is a surprise visit. Took a little drive to see how you and William were.”

Wynter was watching his wife’s face. He saw the colour come back to it,

and her eyes lose their defensive and questioning darkness.

“ I’m so glad, Aunt Kate.”

She came to them. She kissed her aunt on the cheek, and the kiss was returned.

“ Come in, Aunt Kate.”

Miss Garbutt developed an even more jocund and bustling mood. Yes, she wanted to see everything. And wasn’t it charming ! So petite and colourful. And this was the kitchen. Pastry ? Really, she must not spoil Rachel’s cooking. And had they a cat or a dog ? No. Well really they ought to keep a dog.

Rachel was watching her aunt with a faint and puzzled frown. Never had she known such animation, such cheerful and comprehensive gabble.

“ The kitchen can wait, Aunt Kate.”

“ Well, I’ll sit for a minute in this sweet room, and then William must show me the orchard.”

Wynter was observing her with silent steadfastness, but Miss Garbutt was not sensitive to atmosphere. Her garrulousness continued, the artificial animation produced by other stimuli. Her spectacles beamed upon both of them ; her face had a flushed flaccidity. Wynter and his wife exchanged glances without Miss Garbutt noticing it.

“ Would you like some coffee, Aunt Kate ? ”

“ No, my dear, thank you very much. Really, I am very well fed at the ‘ Queens’. And such a pleasant staff.”

Ultimately Wynter conducted her round the estate, which included a visit to the chickens, and even the chickens were declared to be charming. So were the broad beans and the early potatoes. Miss Garbutt rambled round and on, returning at last to the cottage to kiss Rachel and say

goodbye.

"You must come and have dinner with me some day soon, yes, both of you."

"Thank you, Aunt Kate."

Wynter accompanied her to the orchard gate, and saw her into the car, and then returned to the cottage. Rachel was waiting for him in the porch. Her serious little face asked the inevitable question.

"Bill, what does it mean?"

He hesitated for a moment.

"I'm afraid she was just a little fuddled."

"Fuddled?"

"Let it go at that, darling. I never thought that I should be rather sorry for that old woman."

Rachel gave a little shiver of the shoulders.

"I wish she hadn't come here like that. I would almost rather she ----"

"Forget it, my sweet. She can't spoil all this."

"No, Bill, but she's almost more ---- No, I won't say it."

Wynter could have supplied the word for her. Drowning misery in drink, and draining from it a fallacious feeling that all life was lovely in an intoxicated world. Could not the world be sufficiently lovely without the persuasiveness of alcoholic aids? He looked at his trees and smiled.

They had gooseberry tart for Whitsuntide, not a very big one, and gooseberries were scarce in Harrowfield. Wynter could have sold bushels of them had his bushes been older, but that there should be market was a point to be remembered. But with June his whole consciousness appeared to be absorbed by his apple trees. Rachel would see him wandering around and peering up into the foliage, and the foliage was clean and healthy, and caterpillars almost nonexistent. A few of the younger trees had had to be

given a bath of arsonate of lead, and the nasty little green gentlemen had turned yellow and eaten no more chlorophyll.

He came running in to her one day with a flushed face and excited eyes.

“ Rachel, come and look.”

Old Tom was out there, rubbing his chin and smiling. The little green beggars who had played hide and seek with them had had to give up the game. Old Tom lifted a branch as Rachel and William joined him, and there were the young apples grinning at them. The tree was a Keswick Codlin and the spurs were crowded with the young fruitlets.

“ There they be, ssir.”

“ By Jove, Tom, I hadn’t spotted these.”

“ It be the same on the Blenheims and Bramleys, ssir, but they be a bit more shy.”

Rachel caught her husband by the arm.

“ Bumper crop, Miss.”

Rachel felt like kissing Tom.

“ Aren’t they a bit too thick, Tom ? ”

“ They’ll thin theyselves, sir. Apple drop late in the month. Don’t ‘ee worry.”

“ I’m not worrying. Gosh, how many apples would a tree like that old Blenheim carry ? ”

“ Maybe a thousand, maybe, more.”

“ They’ll be some picking and selling.”

Tom grinned.

“ Remember that there frost, ssir.”

Rachel squeezed her husband’s arm.

“ Isn’t it wonderful. And I can help with the picking.”

Assuredly she was to help with the picking, but life was not to be consistently wonderful, or every day a purple patch in the emotional pattern of their little world.

II

There had been the Government's decision to double the strength of the Territorials, and Wynter, remembering those uncomfortable minutes in the lounge of the "George", tried to put the problem out of his mind, and that -- according to the new psychology -- may be the beginning of secret inward stresses. It may appear so easy to lock your particular skeleton up in a cupboard, but the damned thing may be sufficiently alive to rattle its bones at you. There were people who were talking of the inevitableness of another war, and who were determined not to suffer another Munich. Again, there were people -- a very few -- who knew how grossly unprepared the country was for war, and it happened that the dark young man of the "George" lounge was one of them. He had an uncle who was in a position to know the worst, and how serious the worst could be, and Sir James Marston had passed his knowledge to the nephew.

Rachel was cleaning house one morning when she heard someone knocking, and running downstairs she found a dark, lithe, and very serious young man standing in the porch. He raised his hat to her.

"Mrs. Wynter?"

"Yes."

"Is your husband in?"

"Yes, somewhere in the orchard. I think you will find him where the vegetables are."

He gave her an appreciative and interested look, for the Wynter romance had become public property, and again raising his hat, he walked away into the orchard. Rachel stood for a moment, watching him, and wondering what he wanted with her husband.

It was not one of Tom's days, and Wynter was alone, hoeing weeds on the far side of a row of runner beans, and so absorbed was he on the job that Captain Marston's "Good morning" took him unawares. He straightened, and leaning on his hoe, looked darkly at his visitor.

"Good morning."

"Pleasant spot -- this. May I have a few words with you?"

Wynter nodded and was silent. He was uncomfortably aware of what those words might be.

"You probably know, Mr. Wynter, about the increase in the Territorial force."

"I do."

"I'm wondering whether you would change your mind and join us. We need officers, and you have had experience."

Wynter's face was frosty.

"I think I told you then -- that I'm not fit."

"Yes, you did."

"I have an all time job here, and I am married."

He made himself meet the other man's eyes, and neither of them flinched from the issue.

"I suppose you know that war is almost certain, Mr. Wynter?"

"So I gather."

"Well, I must say you look pretty fit."

Wynter's eyes gave a flash.

" Thanks for the compliment. It may be easy to judge the other fellow."

" Too easy, sometimes."

" Thanks. Do you mind if I get on with the job ? "

" Not at all."

He gave Wynter a look which no man could misconstrue or forget, and without any more argument, walked off towards the white gate, and Wynter went on with his hoeing. He jabbed at the weeds, and his face looked pinched and hard. Captain Marston had left a sore spot on his consciousness. He had paused for a moment when he became aware of Rachel, and for a second or so he was afraid of his wife.

" Bill."

" Yes."

He knew what she wished to ask him, and he lied to her.

" That chap. Oh, he wanted to know whether I should have apples to sell."

He did not see the twinge of comprehension that puckered up her face. She knew -- somehow -- that he was concealing something, and it hurt her, but more for his sake than her own.

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So, these two lads who, in their brittle, dark sincerity, were so alike and should have liked each other, were antagonised by their own good qualities, because both were involved, but so differently, in a new martyrdom of man. Marston, meeting future and fellow soldiers at the Harrowfield Drill Hall, was to refer to Wynter as "A poor twirp". The fellow had no guts or had left them behind in Spain. Young Marston had secrets of his own, and being both hypersensitive and heroically unheroic, could mistrust his own courage and so show to himself and other men a passionate ruthlessness. He was to die in a Normandy orchard, ruthless to himself even to the last.

Meanwhile, the man in the Sussex orchard had other and more immediate concerns, the question of a market and the disposal of apples by the thousand. He could have sold the crop of the trees, and watched some alien gang doing the job with casual roughness, broken branches, fruit spurs torn off, sound apples shaken down to be bruised like windfalls. Had he been the fruit-grower he was to be, with money and transport at his service, his lorries could have carried a daily load to London. His urge was otherwise, and its implications had to be explored.

Harrowfield's principal greengrocer and fruiterer was a gentleman named Snape, and Sydney at that. He had prospered and had money invested in real estate, and bore the reputation of being a tough landlord, but he continued to serve in his shop, though with the air of an autocrat. He wore a gold signet ring, and in physical make-up could have played the part of a pirate, a red handkerchief knotted round his black kinky hair, his ears beringed, and pistols tucked into his belt. He had become abrupt

and incisive, and was take it or leave it to the more obscure among his customers.

Wynter, cycling down into Harrowfield with the idea of interviewing Mr. Snape, parked his bike carefully against the shop window, and was in immediate trouble. Bicycles left against shop windows caused Mr. Snape particular indignation. He happened to be standing just inside the door, and he came out on the pavement.

“ You can take that bike away from my window. Some of you people have no sense.”

Wynter humoured the gentleman, but it was not a happy beginning.

“ Sorry, Mr. Snape. I wanted to see you.”

“ What about ? ”

“ I wondered whether you would consider buying apples.”

Mr. Snape gave him a bead look. He was in one of his most awkward moods.

“ I don't buy in dribs and drabs.”

“ No ? Well, I have a pretty big crop.”

“ Yes, off old trees. No use to me. I only buy high grade stuff.”

That was enough for William Wynter. He wished Mr. Snape good morning, and wheeled his bike back into the road.

The day was to continue impropitious. Wynter had dismounted to walk up the last and steepest stretch of hill when he saw ahead of him and moving like some great brown caterpillar “ B ” company of the local Territorials who had been out on a recruiting march. Captain Marston was leading the Company, and the men were marching at ease, whistling, and ready to exercise rustic wit upon all and sundry. Wynter paused, his hands gripping the handle bars, and his impulse was to mount his bike and turn back towards Harrowfield. There was a sudden anger in him at his

flinching. Was Marston to be proved right about his courage or lack of it ? He pushed on with jaw set, and eyes fixed upon the approaching column. He compelled himself to look at the face of that other man, but Marston swung by, head in air, his eyes on the horizon, and Wynter felt cold scorn march past him.

Not so the men. They were feeling fine fellows, with the right to rally any young man in civies.

“ Blown, brother, what ? ”

“ Get on and stick it.”

“ Cor, we some guts.”

Wynter wheeled his bike past these grinning men to a chorus of rude banter. Could he grin back ? He could not. His face was as stiff as frozen meat. A second young officer brought up the rear and he gave Wynter an ironic salute. He kicked the orchard gate open, and sent it swinging back against the latch-post.

At the mid-day meal he was moody and silent, secretly sore from the rebuffs of the morning. That old curmudgeon of a Snape had called his beloved trees old rubbish, and Marston had ---- . No, he did not think about Marston and his handsome, striding scorn. He gobbled his food in silence, and Rachel watched him.

He had become moody and aloof of late. Wasn't he happy with her ? Didn't she understand him ? Had he married her out of pity ?

“ Bill.”

“ Yes.”

“ Are you worried about something ? ”

“ Worried ? No.”

Again there was silence, and she was very near to tears. A minute later

he had pushed his chair back, and was standing by the window filling a pipe, and doing it with an air of concentrated fierceness. As a rule he put his feet up for twenty minutes, and read a book or talked to her. Today he walked straight out into the orchard, the pipe struck sideways in his mouth.

She stood up and watched him, and her eyes were wet. If there was something that troubled him, why did he not tell her? She was more than an idle ear to any worries that might be his.

She cleared away, washed up, went upstairs and put on a hat. She was quite calm now, with a blanched calmness. She got her bike out of the shed, saw no sign of him, and feeling guilty, rode off for Harrowfield.

She found Mary Lovell in a long chair in the garden, a Mary Lovell who gave one look at her, and divined disharmony. She tossed a cushion on to the grass.

“ Sit, my dear. And what is the trouble ? ”

“ It’s about Bill. He -- he seems unhappy. And I can’t bear it.”

“ Oh yes you can, my dear. Tell me.”

She was told, with Rachel leaning against the chair, and having her hair stroked.

“ I have begun to be afraid.”

“ Of what ? ”

“ That he married me out of pity.”

“ Nonsense, poppet. Living with a man is a kind of art, and a liberal education. Men have moods. They go away on journeys of their own.”

“ And then ---- ? ”

“ They come back to you, especially if you don’t fuss.”

Rachel turned a sudden, eager face to her.

"But -- one wants to help."

"Of course you do. Shall I tell you a secret? Leave a man alone. Don't ask questions. Just be gentle and -- as usual -- and he'll bless you. Half the marriages that go a' awry -- may be due to too much fuss."

II

William Wynter's moody aloofness lasted for two days, and then a curtain might have been lifted, and his face became to Rachel as it had always been, nor was he unaware of the transformation and the blot of self-absorbed gloom that preceded it. He had told his first lie to his wife and he had snubbed her, and there she sat with her gentle and luminous little face, pouring out his tea, and ready to smile at him. Had she been conscious of his descent into Hades, and remained mute and patient, waiting for him to emerge from inspissated and angry gloom? She had asked no questions, and betrayed no temper.

"I say, darling, let's have a day off. Let's bike into Westings, and go to a show or something."

"Oh, Bill, I'd love to."

"It's one of Tom's days. He can manage. You don't get much fun here."

She protested.

"Oh, yes I do. I love it all." But she did not add -- "If you are happy."

Tom was ready to carry on. He was full of wise-cracks these days, and strange prophetic sayings. He had reached the age when an old man talks to himself, and to his spade, and trees, and unrepentant weeds. "Oh, you be there, be you. Take that. I'll give 'ee what I'd like to give Hitler." Yes, war was in the air, and Tom would stand and stare at the sky as though

foreseeing sinister black birds soaring over peaceful Sussex. "You'll drop yer messes, will 'ee. Nasty black bastards." Then he would go on poking at the weeds, or gathering rotting apples for a cleansing fire. Almost it was a sacred flame, purging the world of filth and parasites.

Leaning on his hoe, he watched husband and wife wheel their bikes to the white gate. Mr. Wynter had drawn lucky in marrying that pretty, gentle child. And did he know his luck? A man would be a fool if he didn't, and Mr. Wynter was no fool. But, there you be. Young men could be restless beggars these days, especially the lads who know naught of anything but streets, and pubs, and cinemas. And football matches. Cor! Fellahs shouting for Notts County or Aston Villa as though the teams were Notts or Aston, when they were Scotch and Welsh and Irish and British, bought from all over the place. Might as well buy up a team of Niggers and call 'em Chelsea, the Black Buns. And thousands of other young chaps standing about and yelling, and never putting a boot to a ball. Hadn't that there Mr. Kipling once spoken of Flannelled Fools and Muddied Oafs? Tom had never played a game of any sort, and never needed such diversion. Doing your job was a good enough game.

Well, well, well, Mr. Wynter had been a bit funny the last few days. Was he the restless sort who -- having had one woman, begins to look around for another? That was nature, that was, until a man got children and sense, and was tired after a hard day's work, and preferred a pipe and his missus to rushing around after strange petticoats. No, Mr. Wynter was no fool, and a straight young chap. He'd learn that what you'd got might be much better and more comfortable than what you hadn't.

III

William and Rachel had a merry ride, coasting gaily down the hills, and the husband giving his wife a push up them. There was a parking place for bikes on the parade, and an attendant in charge, and they left their machines with him, and strolled. They could get a light lunch at the Cadena, and go and see Deana Durbin in a picture. Then, in the High Street, Wynter beheld Westings' principal florists, fruiterers and greengrocers. It was owned by a Mr. Parkin, and advertised itself as "Parkin's -- The Flower People". Wynter, with Rachel's arm linked in his, took a long and professional look at the Parkin produce. Apples? Not much of a show. A few impressive specimens of Beauty of Bath and Gladstone.

"I say, darling, I wonder if we could do a deal here?"

"Why not, Bill?"

"Let's try. Come in too. You'll give me confidence."

The very spacious shop was nearly empty, and Wynter could admire its order and cleanliness, its colour and background of fruit and flowers. A young woman in a white linen blouse came towards him, and she addressed herself to the lady. Mr. Parkin's shop had manners as well as fine fruits of the earth.

"What can I do for you, madam?"

That was indeed high courtesy to a wife of seventeen. Rachel smiled.

"It's my husband ----"

The girl turned to the man.

"Yes, sir?"

"Is Mr. Parkin in?"

"Yes, in the office."

“ Could I see him. It’s a personal matter. My name is Wynter.”

The girl liked the look of Mr. Wynter, and the way he spoke, and she also liked his wife.

“ I will go and see.”

She disappeared through a glazed door at the back of the shop, and William and Rachel looked at the flowers and the fruit. A sumptuous display this, save for the scarcity of apples. Then the girl returned and beckoned.

William and Rachel found a stout little man in his shirt sleeves, and wearing a gent’s boater, standing at a high desk on which ledgers lay. He turned a jolly red face to them, and appraising the lady with one jocund, blue-eyed stare, he removed his hat.

“ Good morning, madam, good morning, sir. What can I do for you ? ”

Wynter came to the point at once.

“ I hope we are not wasting your time, Mr. Parkin, but I grow apples, and I wondered whether you would be interested in them.”

Mr. Parkin placed a chair for the lady.

“ Well, I might be. One of my merchants has let me down. The crop is short this year. Got many ? ”

“ Thousands. I took over an old orchard at Harrowfield.”

“ Not old Carter’s orchard, by any chance ? ”

“ Yes, the very one.”

Mr. Parkin appeared interested, and just a little skeptical.

“ I thought that old orchard was ---- ” and he hesitated and looked at Rachel. Mr. Parkin had an eye for a pretty face, a face that was like prime fruit, softly coloured and suggesting sweetness. These modern, Golden Crabs were enough to give Eros a tummy-ache.

Wynter, sensing his hesitation, spoke up for Carter's orchard.

"Yes, it was just a question of grubbing the trees or spending money. We put in a great deal of work last winter, and planted young stuff. Well, we have the most amazing crop."

Mr. Parkin, his hands in his trouser pockets, expressed pleasure, and Wynter went on.

"I can see, Mr. Parkin, that low grade fruit is of no use to you."

"That's so, sir. And you know what the public is these days. They don't know a Cox from a Codlin, but they all ask for Coxes and Bramleys, and there you are."

"Quite. Standardisation. About six varieties and devil take the rest. Well, we have Bramleys, and Blenheims, and Newtons, but no Coxes yet, and a lot of quite good old apples. If you are interested and have the time, come and look at them."

Rachel's voice added, "And we can give you tea, Mr. Parkin."

Mr. Parkin had no hat on to raise to her, but he did give her a little paunchy, jocund bow.

"Thank you, madam. I should like to come and see the old place. What day would suit you?"

"Any day. Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow it shall be, madam. I will drive over. And thank you."

Wynter and Mr. Parkin smiled at each other, and Wynter put to Mr. Parkin's credit his tactful silence as to how poor old Carter had come to his end. Yes, Mr. Parkin and Mr. Snape were antipodal in the matters of manners and bonhomie.

Outside the shop Rachel made a suggestion.

"Bill, oughtn't we to go and see Aunt Kate?"

Wynter, feeling good after his propitious interview with Mr. Parkin, did not object.

"Yes, darling. I think we might, if she is still at the 'Queens'."

So, to the Queen's Hotel they went, with its memories of a happy day, and were met by Mr. Burton the head porter, dark and courteous and so very likeable. He remembered them.

"Good morning, madam, good morning sir. Glad to see you again."

"Yes, that was a good day," said Wynter. "Is Miss Garbutt in the hotel?"

Mr. Burton looked a little bothered.

"Yes, sir, but she is laid up for a day or two. I rather think she is not fit to see visitors."

Rachel showed concern.

"Is it anything serious?"

Mr. Burton was suave and diplomatic.

"An attack of gastritis, I understand, madam."

"Will you tell her we called?"

"I will, madam."

They wandered off to take two deck chairs in the sun, and Rachel, gazing at a placid sea, asked her husband a question.

"I wonder what the matter is?"

Wynter, groping for coppers to pay the deck-chair man who was approaching, prevaricated.

"Oh, she may have eaten something that disagreed with her."

He paid the attendant, and pocketed the tickets.

"What did you think of Mr. Parkin?"

"Rather an old duck, Bill."

"Yes, that rather describes him. Cheerful quack-quack. It is going to be

a great help to us if he agrees to take some of our crop."

"I have a feeling that he will," for Rachel was now sufficiently woman to realise that when a Mr. Parkin looked at you appreciatively, he might be persuaded to turn an appreciative eye upon an apple.

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Mr. Parkin arrived in a natty car and a natty lounge suit, and a face that was as cheerful and rubicund as a well coloured apple. Wynter opened the orchard gate for him so that he could drive his car in off the road, and Mr. Parkin emerged with a basket of black grapes.

“ For the lady, sir.”

The omens were propitious.

“ We’ll have tea first, Mr. Parkin. Most kind of you to bring that present.”

They strolled towards the cottage, and Mr. Parkin, casting his eyes upon the old trees brilliant with fruit, was moved to congratulations.

“ My word, sir, I never saw the old place like this.”

Rachel, who had the kettle on the boil, was watching from the porch, and she had put on her prettiest frock, and Wynter had teased her about the frock. Vamping the old boy to persuade him to buy apples. Well, why not ? If a woman looked like a shabby old cooker where would business be ? She came out to meet them, and Mr. Parkin raised a soft brown hat, and made his presentation. Only in and about the shop, and during summer did he wear his gent’s boater.

“ Oh, Mr. Parker, how lovely ! And how kind of you.”

Wynter, in a puckish moment, completed the conventional refrain, “ And I simply adore grapes.”

Rachel had prepared a very special tea, a creamy buttery tea which so soon was to be a thing of the past. Mr. Parker enjoyed his tea, and it was evident that he thought everything, including his young hostess, charming, but the tea was only a prologue to an apple pilgrimage, and to

the discovery that Mr. Parkin was no mean pomologist. Well, had he not been buying and selling apples for close to forty years, and his father had been a professional fruitgrower -- if modestly so -- in Kent ? Mr. Parkin, smoking a large and curly pipe, became quite excited, and quacked exultantly like Rachel's duck.

"Why, bless my eyes, but you've got a Golden Pippin !"

"That one ?"

"Yes, supposed to be extinct, though I remember it as a boy. Used to be a favourite in the old days."

"I say, that's splendid. Even old Tom Lavender can't name a lot of these trees. You see that Blenheim ?"

"Sure it's a Blenheim, sir ?"

"We thought so, though every other one in the row looks just a shade different. More russet on some of them."

Mr. Parkin, having politely asked permission, picked an apple from two trees, and holding one in each hand, considered them.

"You've got another surprise packet here, sir. Look. This apple's just a bit more flattened, and as you see, is just a trifle more russety."

"Yes. I see that."

"Well, I'd say this one is an Orleans Reinette, one of the best eating apples that ever was. Gone out of fashion or the breed got worked out in most orchards."

"Not quite ripe yet, is it ?"

"No, sir. Coloured early this year, much earlier than usual. Begins to blush as a rule in September," and he gave Rachel a jocund grin.

"Any use for marketing ?"

"Why, yes, sir. I'd like to show an Orleans Reinette again, properly

labelled, and try to teach some of the ladies that England grew prime apples when the U.S.A. was chewing baccy and spitting. Excuse me, madam."

They inspected the Stirling Castles, Bramley Seedlings and the Lane's Prince Alberts, and the Worcester Pearmans, and it was obvious that Mr. Parkin was enjoying himself. His curly pipe bubbled like some wind instrument. And what were Mr. Wynter's young trees? Oh, Cox and Laxton's Superb, and some of the newer Laxtons, and Wagoner, and Crawley Beauty. Mr. Parkin looked for wind-falls, and found but few which had been holed by Codlin Moth.

"Nice clean crop, sir. You must have grease banded."

"We did. Caught hundreds of the wingless Winter moth lady which crawls up in the trunks in October. And there was an interesting and queer thing about that. The female moths laid strings and patches of green eggs on the bands."

"Did they -- now?"

"A kind of last maternal spasm, I suppose, doing the job before dying."

"You've got eyes, Mr. Wynter."

"Well, there's always something to see and learn in the country."

"You're right, sir."

Then they came to business, and it was Mr. Parkin who broached it. He would take all the apples Wynter had to sell at a fair market price. And transport? Well, he could send his van out, and supply baskets. Wynter's one worry would be the picking.

That there was another worry, far more grim and universal than the gathering of an apple crop may have been in the minds of both men, for August was near its end, and the crisis threatening, but they spoke of nothing but apples. Mr. Parkin was one of those happy optimists who could

not believe that German bombs might fall on his pleasant shop in Westings High Street. The Russians were being dirty and difficult ; they always would be so ; it was in the nature of the beast. And Hitler was putting up his last bluff. Invade Poland ? Not he.

William Wynter was far less confident, but sufficient unto the day was the day's good deed. He had found a ready and likeable purchaser for his apple crop, and the financial problem would be more than eased. He saw Mr. Parkin off in the neat black saloon, and went back to give his wife the news.

" He is going to take the whole crop, darling."

" Oh, Bill, how splendid."

" You won't have to cut down the winter coal."

II

It so happened that Wynter's early desert apples, the Worcester Pearmans, were on the further side of the orchard and bounded by one of the Fox Farm Woods. There was a path through the wood from the high road. Tom had gone home, and Wynter had strolled across to Fox Farm to see John Wilmer about some chicken feed. Rachel had had some washing on the line, and going out to unpeg it she heard strange sounds in the orchard, scufflings, a crack as of a bough breaking, and at that very moment Wynter appeared at the back door.

" Hullo. Can I help ? "

She held up a finger.

" Listen, Bill."

They heard another crack, and faint thuddings as of apples falling.

"God!" said Wynter, and went running through the cottage garden.

He caught the louts at the Worcesters, four of them. Two were up in the trees knocking down the apples, the others filling pockets and old sacks. They spotted Wynter when he was fifty yards away, shouted to each other, and ran for it. The two in the trees came down with a small cascade of fruit. All four made for the wood.

But two of them were large louts, and arrogant. Once through the thin hedge they faced about and brazened it out. Who was this town toff anyway, and before his coming Carter's Orchard had been easy plunder.

Wynter walked over to the hedge.

"You hand those apples over, you damned young thieves. And I want your names."

They jeered at him, and then one of them struck up an inspired refrain in which the others joined ----

"We know all about you. Cowardy, cowardy custard. Couldn't take no mustard."

Wynter was white and furious. The two bigger louts stood their ground, and the other two joined them. Thumbs were applied to noses, and fingers spread. The largest lout of all had a spotty face, and a lower lip that hung down on his chest, and yet, despite his low cast face he had picked up some of the highbrow lingo.

"I want your names," said Wynter.

"Come and get 'em. You wait. There won't be no snobs or private property when us is up, as we shall be."

"Is that so? And where will stupid brutes like you be? I want your names."

"Come and get 'em, and get more than you bargain for."

Angry he might be, and yet he was cool enough to realise that a dog-fight with the four of them he might gain little satisfaction, and perhaps receive a licking. He had no stick with him, and had he had one and used it he might find himself involved in a police-court case, to be stigmatised as a brutal beater-up of mere mischievous boys. Such was the temper of a hard and sentimental generation.

“Right. I know your faces, especially the ugly one with the spots. I shall put the police on the case.”

“Yah,” said the spotty one, “You’re a bloody funk, that’s what you be.”

And there the unlovely episode ended. Wynter, conscious of a feeling of shame at the jibes that had been spat at him, stood there in white silence until the four of them slouched off. He heard their vulgar laughter, and their loud, coarse voices. Were such as these to be the English men of the future, oafs who had been educated according to certain standards, and whose teachers had taught them neither manners nor to speak their own lovely language. Then quite suddenly, he became aware of the beauty of the evening sunlight upon woodland, and the silence that settled upon it. Why had birds enchanting voices, while man’s could be far more raucous than a carrion crow’s? He gave a toss of the head and laughed. He had coined a new name for arrogant young proletarians. They were “The Yows”.

He walked back to look at the Worcester Perriman’s, and found that no great damage had been done, save perhaps to the unbroken peace of the place. Again he laughed. Well, he would carry out a dawn and dusk patrol until the apple crop was in. Rachel was waiting for him by the cottage gate, an anxious Rachel, and her little distant figure seemed to lift his vision above the faces of young louts. He was aware of her significance, and of the lovely contour of the hill upon which Fox Farm stood amid its

trees. Was your philosophy so frail that it could be shaken by louts' mockery and lout laughter ? Yes, in a sense, it was. The incident had left a sore spot in him.

" All right, darling. No great damage."

He did not betray his smart to her.

" Just marauding louts. I'll see it doesn't happen again."

But she was wiser than he knew as to spots that had been left in him, for his face had become an open book to her which she was ever ready to read.

III

The lout-world was soon to be forgotten. Crisis was in the air, and on that September Sunday, William and Rachel sat side by side on the sofa and listened to the voices of a man who had striven for peace and who had failed to find it.

There was to be War.

Wynter had lit a pipe. He held his wife's hand, but his eyes were looking out at those sunlit trees with their rich harvest, a little world at peace. He bit hard on the stem of his pipe and wondered. Would he be dragged from this apple world, and away from the creature who sat beside him ? Oh, damn war and the madness of men ! And then that tired voice ceased, and there was a strange silence.

He felt the pressure of his wife's fingers, and suddenly he smiled at her.

" Well, that's that ! "

What more could be said about it ?

IV

But apples remained, thousands of them, and the picking of apples. Even the gathering of this lovely crop was a solace and a necessity, and somehow of symbolic significance. Eve was no Eve here, and Adam very much in his Eden. Let the whole world go mad ; he had found himself in an apple tree. And Mr. Parkin was asking for apples, more and more apples. Keswick Codline and Worcester Pearmans. Tom was with them every day now, and he and the two young things laboured from dawn to dusk. The great brown baskets with their loads of fruit waited by the white gate for Mr. Parkin's van. Tom and Wynter manhandled them. They were too heavy for a slip of a girl to carry, nor was Rachel allowed up ladders. She was given a pair of steps and permitted to gather the fruit which was easily within her reach. And Mr. Perkin was a prompt payer. Good money was coming in.

They were seeing more of their neighbours, especially the Wilmers of Fox Farm. Tom Wilmer was a large, powerful, laconic person who had hung on through the years of depression and neglect, and sucked from them a saturnine shrewdness. He had dark eyes that could flash, and a fist that was to be feared, as more than one impudent worker had discovered. His wife, comfortable and old fashionedly Ethel, was a pleasant blonde whose smile had remained untarnished. They had a strapping daughter, Doris, who had taken a fancy to Rachel.

Tom Wilmer had served as a yeoman in the first war, and come back to a world for heroes and a starved countryside, and countrymen have long memories. No martial fool - this. Laconic he might be, and magnanimously grim, but he had a flair for things, and a visionary shrewdness that could chuckle.

To Wynter he said, "Buy, buy, buy any bloody thing you may find useful. Dig yourself in. We chaps on the land are going to be It, or I'm no prophet."

They were watching the last load of wheat sailing into the Fox Farm rickyard, and Wynter saw a smile spread over Wilmer's swarthy face.

"See that, Bill. I'm ready to bet that our lords and masters may be on their knees to us -- for that. What if that Hitler bloke sinks Canadian wheat-ships? This fool country may be in a bit of a mess."

Wynter looked at the rising rick, and felt for a pipe.

"Lose or win on food, what?"

"Absolutely."

"I'd like to turn up more soil."

"Do it, and do it now. My tractor will be out on the stubbles next week. I could plough a couple of acres for you."

"That's awfully good of you."

"Rot! I guess we may be a mutual aid show before this business is over."

"I think you're right."

"Spend money, cash in on the soil. Pound notes may be waste paper. And there may come a time when there'll be damn-all to buy with them."

This tough Sussex Seer might be wiser than he knew, and the forcefulness of his counsel moved Wynter to take thought for the future. Good money was coming in, and should he gamble on the old orchard's continuing fruitfulness? His young trees on No. 9 Stock would not be bearing for a year or two, but bush fruit might be paying proposition while the younger trees matured. He sat down at night and listed additional equipment, and counted the capital securities he possessed. Should he sell and put another thousand pounds or so on and into the soil, yes; and while such stuff could be purchased, and official restrictions had not made buying

impossible.

"Permits for everything, even for cutting your toenails," another of Tom Wilmer's pithy sayings; "we found that out in the last war."

But -- Rachel? Ought she to be consulted? Was it not her show as well as his? Cutting their invested income by another forty pounds or so was a serious matter.

"Darling."

"Yes, Bill."

"Come here."

She stood looking over his shoulder, and his pipe stem pointed to the problems on paper.

"Wilmer says buy, dig in. Read all that. It may mean spending some of our capital."

She laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It's your money, Bill."

"No, ours. Your show as well as mine. Shall we risk it?"

He ran through the various items with her, and she was thinking, "Oh, if I had some money of my own I'd give it all."

"Well, that's the position. A gamble on future crops. What do you say, darling?"

She kissed the top of his dark head.

"I say -- yes, Bill."

V

Before taking action Wynter biked into Westings and had a talk with Mr. Parkin. He put his own future position to Mr. Parkin. Would Mr. Parkin be

a permanent purchaser of soft fruit as well as apples, and Mr. Parkin was reassuring. He, like many others, did not foresee the tragedy ahead, and the southeast coast towns half emptied under the threat of bombing and invasion.

Wynter left Mr. Parkin's office well satisfied, and then it occurred to him that he might inquire for Miss Garbutt at the Queen's Hotel. They had neither seen nor heard from the lady for some weeks.

Wynter was met by the discreet and courteous Burton.

"Miss Garbutt? Oh -- she left us just after war was declared, sir."

"Is that so. Do you know where she went?"

"Yes, any letters were to be redirected to Torquay."

Wynter sensed a certain carefulness in the head-porter, and he refrained from asking a particular question which Mr. Burton might have shirked honouring. As a matter of fact Miss Garbutt had become an embarrassment to the hotel, especially so after an unseemly and disconcerting scene in the lounge, and the management had requested her to leave. Her room was needed.

Wynter went back to Carter's Orchard with the news, but he did not pass on his own feeling about it to Rachel. Aunt Kate had removed herself from a place that might be visited by German bombers, and what more was there to be said about it.

His possible capital expenditure covered the following items ----

A light van -- to be purchased second-hand -- if possible.

A packing and storage shed for fruit.

A small garage.

A glass-house, cloches and frames.

A motor-pump for water.

A Calor Gas installation.

More bush fruit and dwarf trees.

Five hundred Royal Sovereign strawberries.

A reserve of chemicals for spraying.

Five hundred one pound and two pound punnets.

A hundred gallons of paraffin and storage drums.

Forty gallons of Diesel Oil.

A green-house heater.

An extension ladder.

Mr. Curtis would be his man, and to Mr. Curtis he went. Could Mr. Curtis undertake the necessary work, and could he give him an estimate ?

Mr. Curtis was willing. As yet he had the timber and the labour, and was not reduced to one old painter and a collection of oddments in the matter of material. There happened to be a firm in Westings who specialised in glass-houses, and if Mr. Wynter would give him an idea as to size, Mr. Curtis would get into touch with them.

“ Go ahead, Mr. Curtis.”

“ If you want water in the house hadn't I better get the plumber to work before the cold weather sets in ? ”

“ Good idea. What about gas ? ”

“ Dill's are agents for them. You might see Mr. Dill, sir.”

Wynter saw Mr. Dill, and also his bank manager who was a paternal person and no fool in the matter of gauging a client's integrity. Securities were down in value, and the manager suggested that Wynter would lose money if

he sold at this particular moment. Why not a mortgage on the property ? The Bank, or even Mr. Roper might be able to arrange it.

Wynter passed on to consult Mr. Roper, and Mr. Roper was helpful and sympathetic. He was a comfortable man as to money, and he was ceasing to be interested in the accumulation of personal estate. He himself would grant William a mortgage for a thousand pounds at two per cent.

“ Awfully good of you, sir, but that’s not business.”

“ Old gentlemen, Bill, may be allowed to grow up -- or down -- without bothering too much about -- business.”

But the mortgage never came into being.

The London Press was not sufficiently interested in provincial news to chronicle the adventures or misadventures of an obscure and elderly woman. Miss Catharine Garbutt, emerging after dusk from a local tea-shop where she had added surreptitious stimulants to her tea, was run over and killed by a bus. This had happened early in November, and it was not until the end of the month that the news came to Rachel. Apparently, Miss Garbutt had employed a Westings solicitor to draw up a new will, and Rachel’s letter came from Westings. In formal language it explained that Miss Garbutt had left but one address behind her at the hotel, that of the Westings firm. A representative had travelled to Torquay, been present at the inquest and arranged for the final formalities. The letter went on to say that in Miss Garbutt’s latest will a sum of two thousand pounds had been left to Rachel Wynter, and the lawyers understood that Rachel Wynter was the wife of a certain Mr. William Wynter of Carter’s Orchard, Harrowfield.

The letter arrived by the first post, and Rachel, to whom all letters were rarities, opened it after she had poured out her husband’s tea. So absorbed

was she in reading that strange communication that she forgot her own cup.

“ Oh -- Bill.”

Her face looked pinched and shocked.

“ What’s the matter, darling ? ”

“ Aunt Kate’s dead.”

“ Dead ! ”

“ Yes, she was run over by a bus.”

“ Good lord ! ”

“ And Bill, she has left me two thousand pounds.”

Strangely and suddenly she burst into tears, and Wynter, leaving his breakfast, went round the table to her. Incredible news, and almost incredible tears. Was the little wife of his so soft-hearted, or were these tears ---- ? He put an arm about her, picked up the letter and read it.

“ Poor old thing. Must have happened in the blackout when she ---- ”

He paused. He did not add, “ When -- she -- was half blacked out.” Poor old wretch ! Had there been some change of heart, or had the softening been just tipsy sentiment ? But here was Rachel busy with a handkerchief over the death of an insanely selfish and most unhappy woman.

“ You have a sweet nature, darling.”

“ Oh, Bill, I haven’t. It’s all so mixed up. I -- I can help now ---- ”

“ My dear ! ”

“ You can have all the money for the orchard and all those other things.”

He put his head down and rested his cheek against her’s.

“ Not on your life. It’s right and good for you to have some money of your own.”

“ But I want to help. Supposing I keep half of it, and let you have the

other half. It's my place, darling, as well as yours."

She had her way.

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The black-out curtains of the cottage were to be drawn across windows that were to look out upon a most bitter winter, but William's plans had gone forward before the weather brought snow and furious frosts. Mr. Curtis had the men and the material, and the fruit-shed was completed, also the garage and glass-house, before winter made brick-laying impossible. Wynter had so planned the lay-out that these new buildings were sited behind the cottage and screened by it, and did not break up the beauty of the great orchard. A pump and small Diesel engine had been installed in a new shed built over the well, and the water piped to the cottage, with an additional pipe and two-way valve carrying water to the garage and glass-house. Mr. Dill had procured a Calor Gas outfit. For weeks there was much noise about the place, but it was creative noise and so less disturbing.

Tom Wilmer's tractor and plough had turned up two acres of turf where semi-derelict trees had been grubbed up, and the new bush-fruit was in. Wynter, with Rachel's money to back him, had bought in roll upon roll of rabbit and fruit-wire. Old Tom was an adept at setting snares, but a gun was needed and Mr. Dill supplied it. Some of the furry pests had been nibbling the back of several of the young fruit trees, and Stockholm tar had to be applied to these wanton wounds. Wilmer's woodland harboured the conies, but two dogs with guns and ferrets did much to reduce the population.

The quest of a second-hand van proved more of a problem until Mr. Parkin heard of a van that was on sale at a Westings garage. It was a little green van in good condition, with two spare tyres, and Wynter bought it, and

arranged for a fellow from Harrowfield to give him driving lessons. Much money had passed into other hands, but old Tom was smiling over it.

Carter's Orchard was very much alive.

He was to smile too when the hard weather came, and lighting the morning fire was an act of grace and of joy.

"Don't 'ee worry, ssir. These 'ard winters mean good Springs. Ripen and rest the wood. Not so much chance of terrifyin' frosts in May."

Westings had neither seen nor heard a German plane, and though the Americans were calling the war phoney, Wynter was not happy about it. There was something sinister about this interlude, this fallacious quietism. Had Hitler and the Germans gained all their objectives, and with the collusion of Russia proposing to let the war fizzle into futility? Moreover, the French were Maginot minded, and had shown no urge to fight when the Germans were busy in Poland. And what could England do? Squat in the sea and glumly accept the situation?

Yes, this sinister silence made Wynter feel restless, nor was Tom Wilmer liking it any more than he was. They were seeing much of the Wilmers and Tom and Bill were Tom and Bill to each other. As for young Doris, she was forever running across during the Christmas holidays to help Rachel in the cottage. Doris was fed up with school. She wanted to do things. She and Rachel were such contrasts and complementary to each other. Doris might be a blonde, but she had some of her father's vigour and forcefulness, and she could shake a tawny head at life and talk of getting into khaki.

William and Tom were lucky in getting their winter spraying finished just before the wild weather broke upon them, nor was this to be a mere spreading of a mild white icing upon cake! It was sudden and savage, and Wynter, waking in the night, felt the chill of it, and heard the rushing

wind. The cottage was quivering and creaking, and Rachel woke with him and lay close.

“ Just a storm, Bill ? ”

“ Strange sort of storm,” said he, “ Are you cold ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I don’t like it. Thank God for the new thatch. I’m going to have a look.”

He slipped out of bed, and lit a candle, and drawing the black-out curtain aside, saw that plaster of white powder. Snow ! A howling blizzard. Almost he could hear the orchard trees screaming like a frightened woman, with the wind tossing their wild hair.

He scrambled back into bed, and blew out the candle.

“ Snow. I don’t like it. Snow and a gale together.”

They snuggled close, and lay listening, and Wynter was wondering whether his old trees would ride out the storm.

He was awake very early, and peering through a snow crusted casement. The wind had dropped, but it was too dark as yet for him to see much. He lit the candle and dressed. The room was starkly cold.

“ You stay put, darling. Fire’s needed.”

He and that little solitary flame passed down the stairs. Ye gods, how cold it was ! Would the new pipes be frozen up, in spite of their being lagged ? He drew the curtains, and began with the parlour fire, and a gradual greyness showed through the window. His hands ached with the cold, but his thoughts were with his trees. The fire was alight, and he rose from his knees, and went to the window. A white world, snow piled against the garden fence, a ghostly world. He could not see all he wished to see through the plastered and frozen glass, and going to the porch door he opened it, and a little cataract of snow tumbled in upon his slippered

feet.

Then he saw what he had feared to see. Some of the old trees were down, and lying with half their snow-crueted branches pointing skywards. And Wynter cursed.

He tried to close the door, but the snow jammed it, and he had nothing more practicable than a fire-shovel with which to attack this snow-slide. The cold was intense, and he wanted that door shut, and the parlour fire given a chance. And how many trees were down ? He jabbed fiercely at the snow.

He had not heard the footsteps above. Rachel was at the window, and breathing upon a frosted pane. And then in her impatience she forced a lattice open and sent snow scattering, and saw those uprooted trees, hands raised to heaven, their broken roots sticking out from great lumps of snow-powdered soil. The intense cold seemed to catch her between the breasts. Oh, Bill's beloved trees ! She closed the casement and latched it, and stood mute and shivering, her hands covering her breasts.

Wynter was lighting the kitchen fire when she came downstairs. He did not look at her, and his concentration upon the job of the moment gave her understanding. She did not say -- " Oh, Bill, I'm sorry." She just bent down and kissed the back of his neck.

A minute later he was in gum-boots and mackintosh, and with a face still fierce and frozen. Again she understood. He was going out to confront reality. She got busy with the breakfast things, mute and wide-eyed and wounded because of a disaster that was his. She was dropping two eggs into a saucepan of water when she heard him at the back door, and she did not turn to look.

He kicked the snow from his boots.

"Not as bad as I feared. Just a biblical number, seven."

"Oh -- Bill ---- "

"And not the best trees -- either. Logs for the fire and more room for youth."

II

But other folk were in distress. Wynter was clearing paths with a shovel when Doris Wilmer came stodging through the snow.

"Oh, Mr. Wynter, could you help ? "

"Trouble ? "

"The Dutch Barn is trying to fall over. Dad and the men are trying to rope it and save the hay."

"I'll come. Old Tom should be here in a moment. What a dastardly storm ! "

It was a question of all hands to the ropes, women included, but the mixed team did manage to right the big corrugated roof and save it from collapsing sideways. Then, an enterprising lad, greatly daring, climbed a ladder and with a hay-rake brought much of the snow to earth. Some discarded railway timbers which Wilmer had brought for any old purpose, served as struts to the barn's long legs.

"Better leave the ropes on, Tom, what ? "

"Sure-ly, ssir, for the time being."

"Well, we've saved the hay, and by the look of things we'll need it. Come on in. Drinks all round."

III

Wynter had good cause to thank his foresight, for the blizzard presaged a devil of a frost. The van's radiator was empty, and he had lit a lamp in the well-house, and the new pipes did not freeze. But the old cottage was desperately cold, and the two fires did not warm the upper floor, and snow had found its way down the big old chimney. The poultry drinking fountains had to be thawed twice daily. The snow in the yard was patterned with the footmarks of birds whom Rachel fed with kitchen scraps. Old Tom, exploring, found rabbit tracks all over the orchard, and two or three nibbled trees, and he and Wynter with dead cold fingers, cut panels of wire netting and carried them out to protect the young trees from these starving conies. The pests had even got to work upon the branches of the fallen trees. But here was work to warm the hands and set the blood flowing. Wynter and Tom, with billhook, axe and cross-cut saw, wedges and maul, dismembered the blizzard's victims, and sawed and split the big wood into logs and stacked them in the new apple-shed. Mr. Curtis' work had been sound and adequate, and the new buildings had withstood the stresses of that raging storm.

Foxes too, were on the prowl, and chickens had to be shut up securely at night, and old Tom stapled wire netting round the lower boards of the hen-house, and added a flap of it to the lower half of the door. Tom Wilmer, too concerned with major problems, lost ten birds one January night. The country had gone as wild as the weather. The butcher and the baker were in trouble with snow-caked, frozen roads, and Wynter had to tramp it into Harrowfield and pile his purchases into his old pack. Eggs they had, and potatoes, and cabbages which had to be disinterred and thawed. Fox Farm

gave them milk.

But the cottage knew happiness and laughter, though its most serious moments included getting up in the morning, and getting to bed at night. Wynter would dash downstairs before daylight and light the fires, leaving the black-out curtains drawn over frost-glazed casements. Going to bed was equally an adventure, undressing a race in which man was at an advantage. Feminine transformations were more delicate and delayed, and Wynter could laugh and tease his wife, and call himself a bed-warmer, and an adjunct to a hot bottle. Rachel had let her hair go free, because William liked it like that, and her mirror approved it, and when she slipped into bed beside him that fragrant fleece was sensuously appealing. Wynter would push the hot bottle down to her feet, and they would lie close and warm each other.

As for the War it seemed very far away, stagnant and unreal. The country was concerned with a wild contest of its own, frost to be fought, beasts fed, roots extracted from snow-covered arctic clamps and straw piled back on them. Milking with half frozen fingers at 6 a.m., Wynter, with spare time on his hands, went up and helped Tom Wilmer. Young Doris waded down with the daily milk, and chattered and shared some of Rachel's household chores. Poor Dr. Lovell, clanking about with chains on his car's wheels, was the most overworked man in that corner of Sussex. The winter was more with them than any war, and Wynter's little wife was putting on weight and displaying the bloom of a new youth and happiness, though the butter froze in the larder. They had turned the sofa so that it faced the fire, and the warmth was theirs at night before the laughing adventure of getting quickly into bed.

But all winters pass, which is a platitude beloved of man and yet

mysterious in its very obviousness. The earth was swinging its arctic cap towards the sun, hence snowdrops and then crocuses in Rachel's small front garden. Rachel was loving everything in life, including that little flowery carpet. She had money of her own, and could take Doris out to tea at Harrowfield, and big Doris was becoming a devotee. The douce gentleness of Rachel made her feel more than sisterly. And Bill was such a lamb, and always teasing you, and so much in love with Rachel.

Happy days as yet, and there was not even distant thunder. William and Tom had dealt with the butts of the fallen trees, and cleared the site for new planting. Boxes of seedlings were showing green in the new glass-house, and daffodils were spearing up. Rachel sang softly at her work, for all work seemed good to her in this little home of her's. Life was all so simple and real and satisfying. Maybe she was discovering the eternal blessedness of the simplicities, and a wisdom that a too complex world was losing. For there can be an astonishing wisdom in youth, rising like the sap in the spring of the year, and manifesting like some inevitable flower whose petals may seem eternal.

Was this strange marriage a success ?

Mary Lovell, who had helped to mother it, knew, when Rachel kissed her, that the little world of Carter's Orchard had no poor dead thing hanging from a tree.

IV

It happened at the end of March.

Wilmer's wood adjoining the orchard was a wood of oaks, and oak trees and apple trees should never be neighbours, for the oak serves as a host for the

pests which attack apples. Old Tom knew that. There were three sorts of caterpillar which lived on the leaves of oaks and apples, the green fellons, the hairy reddish black loopers, and the nasty thin coal coloured brutes shaped like a minute snake. Well, there were the oaks and there was nothing that could be done about it. You couldn't spray a whole oak wood with arsonate of lead. But during old Carter's days some of the oaks had reached out too far over the orchard, and were even promising to drop their pests upon some of William's trees.

William put it to Tom Wilmer.

"Do you mind if I cut back some of those oaks?"

"Go ahead. It's your legal right."

"Thanks -- ever so much. We're not lawyers."

"And keep the wood. I don't want it."

Tom was having a day off to dig his garden, and Rachel saw William extracting the extension ladder from a shed. He was whistling, and he waved to her.

"Going to lop some of Tom's oaks. Be in for elevens."

He carried the ladder to the edge of the wood, and returned for the barrow and saw and billhook. The barrow would serve as a sawing-stool. The first tree he proposed to attack was of no great age, and its trunk was narrowish. Wynter ran the ladder up and saw that the catches were secure on a rung. He had left the barrow under the tree.

Maybe, when he is in a whistling mood a man may be cheerfully careless. Wynter, saw in one hand, was half way up the ladder when it wobbled and then twisted sideways. His feet slipped from the rungs, and his hand lost its grip. He had no great distance to fall, and all might have been well with him but for the barrow. He fell across it backwards.

The barrow tipped over and bundled him head first on the grass. The ladder itself had missed him. It was one of those swift and sudden tumbles that leave a man breathless and shocked, but there was more to it than that. The small of his back had struck the edge of the barrow, and he had felt the wrench of strained tissues. Oh, damned fool to leave the barrow there, and under a ladder that might tilt. Half huddled he lay for a second or two numbed and motionless, somehow conscious of the disaster as more than a ricked back. He tried moving his legs, and they seemed to be unwilling legs. And then the pain began.

It was Rachel who found him there. Eleven and no William. She had gone to call him, and seen -- in the distance -- the overturned barrow and something lying beside it. And there was no ladder up the tree.

" Oh, Bill -- darling ---- "

His face was white and stricken, and so was hers.

" The ladder pitched me off. Just damned carelessness. Fell across the barrow."

She was kneeling by him.

" Have you ---- ? "

" Afraid it's a case for Lovell. Feel afraid to move my legs. And the pain ---- "

" Oh, Bill."

" So sorry, darling."

She could divine the fear in him, and her fear matched his. But it was for her to act and to hide her fear.

" I'll go for Mr. Wilmer. He'll send someone for Dr. Lovell. Don't move, darling."

She put her face to his, kissed him and fled.

V

A man pedalled off on a bike to Harrowfield, and Tom Wilmer and two other fellows came down with Rachel and Doris to the orchard. Wynter was lying on his back as straight and still as an effigy on a tomb, but his face was alive and stricken.

"Hello, old man. Ladder tipped you off?"

"Yes, damned careless of me."

"We have sent off for Lovell."

Tom Wilmer was a man used to succouring sick beasts, and from what Rachel had told him and from the stark stillness of that figure on the grass he was wise in his caution. Better not meddle and wait for the doctor.

Wynter turned a restless head. The two other men were standing like mutes.

"Where's Rachel?"

"With Doris."

"What a mess I've made for her. Tom, I'm afraid it's rather bad."

Wilmer went on one knee beside him, and laid a big hand on one of Wynter's.

"You just lie still, my lad. Better not move. We'll look after things. Like a fag?"

Wynter's hand closed on Wilmer's.

"No. I'm scared, Tom. If I have to go to the hospital ----"

"Now, old man, leave it all to us."

He turned and jerked a head at the two mutes.

"Better take the ladder and barrow back, lads."

They went and in silence, and Wynter managed to smile.

"Thanks, Tom. Don't want to be stared at -- somehow. Is Rachel ---- ?"

Wilmer, glancing towards the cottage, saw Rachel crossing the grass.

"She's coming. I'll leave you together for a moment. I hope my chap has caught the doctor."

He and Rachel passed each other, and as they passed he laid a hand for a moment on her shoulder.

"We'll see you through, my dear. I thought it better to wait for Lovell."

Her lips quivered, but no words came from them.

VI

The doctor, whom Wilmer's message had found in Harrowfield, saw the farmer waiting at the white gate. Wilmer swung it open, and Lovell drove in.

"Something serious, Wilmer ?"

"Rather afraid so. Got pitched off a ladder, and fell across a barrow. I haven't meddled. Thought it better to wait for you."

They crossed the orchard together where Rachel was sitting on the grass beside her husband, and holding one of his hands. She gave Lovell a poignant look, and rose, and Lovell nodded at her. It said -- "Yes, my dear, better leave me to do it."

Doris was waiting at the garden gate. She put an arm round Rachel, a strong and loving arm, and Rachel who had borne up till now, broke into sudden tears. The girl's arm tightened about her, and her head touched Rachel's.

"Come in and lie down, darling."

" I -- I -- can't -- till I know. Oh, Doris, if he has broken his back ! "

They stood at a window, arms interlaced.

" Father's coming. I'll go."

" Yes."

Tom Wilmer beckoned to his daughter, and when he spoke to her it was in a lowered voice.

" Get on the telephone to Westings Hospital. Say it's an urgent call from Dr. Lovell. Ambulance needed at once."

" Yes, Dad."

" And say Lovell will be calling the hospital himself in a few minutes."

" Yes, Dad. Know the number ? "

" No. You'll find it in the book. And Doris ---- "

" Yes."

" Come back and stay with Rachel."

Doris nodded and ran.

VII

Dr. Lovell, leaving Wilmer with Wynter, walked slowly across the orchard to the cottage. Rachel was there at the gate, dry-eyed now, and somehow woman confronting her crisis. She looked unflinchingly at the doctor's face.

" Hospital, my dear, I'm afraid."

Her lips quivered.

" Tell me, has he broken his back ? "

Lovell met her eyes.

" An X-ray, my dear. I hope and think not. We must wait for the ambulance

and a stretcher. I'm just going on to Wilmer's to phone the hospital."

"I can go to him now?"

"Yes, go to him. He's been asking for you."

Rachel was packing a few things for William when the ambulance arrived. She watched it drive across the orchard where Lovell and Tom Wilmer and two farm-hands were grouped together. They were taking him away from her! She snatched a hat from a shelf and put it on, and watching from the window saw the five men with infinite care lifting her husband onto a stretcher. Lovell and Tom Wilmer were opposite each other, hands interlocked under Wynter's back.

She ran downstairs with the suitcase, and found Doris waiting.

"I'm going with him."

"I'll look after things -- here."

"Oh, Doris -- you do help me."

They kissed, and Rachel ran across the orchard with her little brown case. The stretcher had been slid into the ambulance, and Lovell, turning, saw that appealing little face.

"I'm coming with him."

He nodded at her.

"I'm following in my car. You can come back with me, Rachel, and if you feel like it -- stay with us."

She shook her head.

"No, I must be here. He'll be so worried about things. Perhaps Doris will stay with me."

The driver of the ambulance took her suit-case, and she climbed in, and sat down beside her husband, and the doors were closed on them. Wynter put out a hand to her and she held it. His face had a twisted tenderness.

" Glad you are coming darling. I'm worried ---- "

" Don't worry, Bill, dear. I'll look after everything."

" But you can't be alone there."

" I think Doris will come to me. I'm almost sure she will."

" Bless her, bless everybody. What a silly, careless fool ---- "

" Don't worry, darling. We have Tom -- and -- I know Mr. Wilmer will help."

" Blessed be all kind people. Maybe -- that's what I have to learn, that kindness is the one thing that matters."

The ambulance rolled out of the gate, and the grass verge caused it to sway, and Wynter winced, yet tried not to show it. A few careless seconds -- and perhaps a broken back !

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Big Doris was waiting at the orchard gate when Lovell's car brought Rachel back from Westings. Doris had her sleeves rolled up, and in more senses than one. Here was the kind of job she asked for.

" I'm staying, Rachel."

They kissed, and Rachel's face had a soft sheen.

" It's not -- what we feared. Isn't that true, Dr. Lovell ? "

Lovell was lighting a cigarette. He nodded, and then smiled at these two young things.

" That's what we think, Rachel, and what the X-ray seemed to show. And thank God for it."

II

But the case of William Wynter was to cause the doctors much worry and perplexity. The X-ray had shown no fracture or displacement, and for the first few days such symptoms were present could be ascribed to strained muscles and ligaments and shock. In fact, both Lovell and his confreres were debating whether the condition did not resemble what has been called "Railway Spine", shock due to a railway accident in which no actual lesion could be discovered. Cases of Railway Spine could be worrying, in that ingenious sufferers might be contemplating profitable damages against a railway company, and medical evidence would be called for in court.

The case of William Wynter was otherwise, and the signs and symptoms genuine, and not self-produced. There was some loss of tactile sense, and partial paraplegia, but no more pain. Lovell was in daily contact by telephone with the doctor in charge of the case, and he was not liking the look of things.

"Hullo, Jackson. How's the lad? Had another X-ray. And negative? Well, what's your idea?"

He listened, frowning, to the other man's voice.

"Haemorrhage into the spine? Yes, might be. Just small extravasation. Could account for the condition. You've had Symes in? He agrees. And the prognosis? H'm, yes. Question of time and treatment. Might be some partial loss of power, and perhaps only temporary. Is Wynter worrying? Yes, poor lad, I supposed so."

Rachel was going into Westings by bus every other day, and she, too, was troubled, and far more so than the doctors. What was the truth about poor

Bill ? She might wear a cheerful face as she sat beside his bed, and told him that all was well at home, with Tom working like a hero, and Doris helping her, but at the back of her husband's eyes she divined that same question. Were the doctors hiding something ? Was William concealing some half suspected truth from her, and from himself ?

The frightened child of a year ago had become a woman. The eternal simplicities had become her's, an elemental urge that needed no psycho-analysis. She sat as mother as well as wife beside his bed, steady eyed, with a courage and dignity that were mysteriously mature. Her very compassion hit its fear. The future might be one cast hypothecation, and she -- the mate of a poor, frustrated cripple, but there was a new young strength in her. She would fight for him and with him for the life that was theirs.

The ward-sister and the nurses were kind women, and utterly at her service. Other patients liked to look at this comely and somehow consoling creature. She was like some grave, quiet, soft-eyed child, suggesting courage and capacities beyond her years.

But she tackled that fateful future, and her husband's doctors, and that in the person of Frank Lovell.

" I want to know the truth, Dr. Lovell. I must know. I can bear to know -- for his sake."

Lovell looked an unhappy man, and felt it.

" We are not too happy about it, Rachel."

" You mean, he may never walk again ? "

" No, perhaps not quite so bad as that. William's is rather a problem case. We cannot say -- yet ---- "

Her eyes looked steadily into his.

"Thank you. I want to know -- because so much will fall on me. You see -- we were so happy -- here, and I want him to go on being happy here. I -- shall do -- what he would have done."

Lovell gave her a man's look.

"You mean, carry on, and ---- ?"

"Why shouldn't I? People are so good. I have Tom, and Doris is going to work with me, and she has a girl friend who wants to join us. Why shouldn't I do it all for Bill, until -- perhaps -- he may be stronger?"

And Lovell marvelled, and the man in him saluted her. The despised and frightened child of yesterday had become both romance and reality in confronting her crisis.

III

Then came that day when she found screens about her husband's bed, and a hurrying nurse, and faces, compassionate faces that looked elsewhere.

She took Rachel by the arm and led her back into the sister's room. There had been a scene, an unpremeditated scene which had shocked the whole ward. In the absence of authority Wynter had said to his neighbour, an old Westings fisherman, "Damn it, I'm going to try," and his neighbour had answered -- "I shouldn't, lad, if I were you." But Wynter, restless and rebellious, had pushed back the clothes, rolled himself out of bed, stood, tried two steps, and collapsed upon the floor. The nurse had come in at that moment, and with the help of a patient who was up, had got Wynter back to bed. He had broken down into tragic tears.

A man's weeping can be almost too tragic, and the screens had gone up, and the ward was strangely silent. Men might look at each other and be mute.

All this was told in a few and rather stumbling words to Rachel.

“ I’m so sorry, dear. Shall I ---- ? ”

Rachel’s eyes were tearless.

“ Let me to go him, Nurse.”

And together they re-entered the ward.

But the nurse remained outside the screens, moving one panel aside for Rachel, and then replacing it. Wynter was lying with his eyes closed, almost like a man who might be dying, or drugged with despair. There was a chair beside the bed. Rachel slipped into it, and bending, put her lips to her husband’s forehead.

He opened his eyes, but did not move.

“ Bill, darling, you shouldn’t ---- ”

She saw his lips quiver.

“ I’m done for, Rachel, just rubbish.”

She caught his hands and drew them in to her bosom.

“ Never. Don’t say such things. I don’t believe it. And I should want you, even ---- ”

He rolled over towards her.

“ Oh, Rachel, I want to go home. I feel like a dead man here, though they are all so kind.”

“ You shall come home, Bill.”

“ But how can I ? You can’t manage.”

“ I can do anything for you.”

IV

It was Mary Lovell who gave the judgement of Solomon in Rachel’s favour,

and against her husband's professional advice.

"Let him come home, Frank. It seems to me he will fret himself to pieces -- there."

"But, Mary, the nursing required. He's a nursing case at present. Bed sores, unless ---- "

"Nurse Adams can cycle up every day. And I can take a turn. Besides -- Rachel is no fool."

"I grant you that. I take off three hats to that child."

"The old platitudes, Frank. Love does help and heal, and that sort of love seems out of fashion."

"Is it? I wonder. There may be something in -- home treatment. And that Wilmer kid is a stout young sportswoman."

So, William Wynter was brought home in the same ambulance on a serene day in early May, before disaster had turned a mock war into dreadful reality. Some of his old trees were still in flower, and he smiled up at them as Wilmer and old Tom, the doctor and the ambulance driver carried the stretcher into the cottage, Rachel walking beside it. Nurse Adams had come up on her bike, and the specially prepared bed was ready in the parlour, and young Doris busy in the kitchen.

Wynter, turning his head this way and that, smiled at all his helpers.

"Oh, thanks, everybody. I'm rather ---- "

Old Tom nodded at him.

"Don't 'ee worry, sir. Everything be going fine."

And William Wynter was put to bed, a bed which Frank Lovell feared might be final.

V

The face of Rachel Wynter was the face of a girl-woman in whom life had planted the mysterious flower of an unutterable compassion. Work, labour, love's labour from dawn to darkness, and she seemed to thrive upon it. Bill was here, utterly hers, husband and small child to be toiled for and succoured. Her daily prayer was as simple as her urge, "Oh, God, make him well."

Wynter's bed was under the window, and when propped up he could watch some of the world without. Doris and old Tom were out with the auto-Culto and spraying attachment, and young Doris in brown breeches and stockings and pullover, was handling the machine like a man, while old Tom used the lance. And there were two other figures over yonder, hoeing through the bush fruit, Rachel and another girl. Had his little world gone petticoat? And would he lie like this forever, head and hands alive, but with useless legs?

Rachel never left him alone for long, and the face of the man in bed was always waiting for her.

"Who's the new hand?"

"Jess. Friend of Doris'."

"I say, darling, aren't you doing too much?"

"No, Bill. Do I look like it?"

"You're lovely. But, Rachel, wages and all that?"

"Doris won't take anything at present."

"What! Just for love of you?"

"Well, we're friends."

"I don't blame her for loving you. Miss Jess?"

" She's just on leave for three months, and then ---- "

" I see. Regular sisterhood."

" It's time for your milk, Bill."

" I wonder you have time for anything."

" Oh yes I have. Plenty."

There were other surprises awaiting him. One morning he saw the green van roll past his window with Rachel at the wheel. She had had driving lessons while he was in hospital, and stores -- domestic and otherwise, were waiting to be collected. Harrowfield, like Dr. Lovell, was taking off its hat to Mrs. Wynter, and admiring her puck and her capacity. Sad business -- for her, life with a semi-paralysed husband. The shop-keepers of Harrowfield were helpful, even the tart Mr. Snape, and a situation was developing which neither Rachel nor William had foreseen. Carter's Orchard, as a business concern, was to be helped and applauded by a community that could be captured by a young wife's courage. Rachel was to become her husband's best advertisement.

Tom, came in to report each day to his master, and Tom painted a rosy picture in contrast to the war news. Blossom had been fine, bees plentiful. Not much weevil, and Tom and Doris had dealt with the caterpillars. Tom had a goodly parade of young tomatoe plants in the green-house. Bush fruit looked well.

" Don't 'ee worry, ssir."

And strange to say, Wynter was not worrying, for as the days grew grimmer, he realised that he was being spared the feeling of self shame which had been so bitter in him. The War could not claim him, and with the realisation of his reprieve, a new urge seemed to wake in him, a secret scheme of self-education. To no one did he confess that he slipped out of

bed each night and stood rigid for a minute or two. If those legs of his could bear him, they might be taught to move.

Tom Wilmer was a daily visitor, and so was the doctor. Mrs. Mary came over twice a week, as did Mr. Roper. Mr. Parkin, driving from Westings, took a look at the orchard, and then sat cheerfully by Wynter's bed.

"Don't you worry, sir. Apples are going to be apples. I can take every one you can sell. That little wife of yours is a wonder."

Wynter smiled at the plump little optimist.

"You are all of you so kind."

"Well, that's not difficult."

And none of them talked War to the man in the bed.

VI

Dunkirk ! Even the disaster of Dunkirk did not shake Mr. Parkin, thought the shadow of a great peril was beginning to spread over this green island. Strange sense of unreality ! This lovely season of the year, fruit blossom, tulips out, and bluebells scenting the woods, grass lushing up for hay, a serene sky. Inexorable contrasts ! Perhaps no one felt this strange, haunting sense of unreality more than Augustus Roper, with a dead son over yonder and a wife lying in Harrowfield churchyard. Frank Lovell, too, seemed to feel his own war-wound as he drove about the countryside, and wondered whether that tranquil sky would become horrible with German bombers. Would the French hold out ? Lovell had begun to doubt it.

Moreover, he was sensitive to the subtler reactions. Faces looked glum to him. Here and there an easy-osy complacency born of ignorance and an

unwillingness to face reality made him wonder how the plain man would face up to disaster. Would a kind of palsy, a shocked apathy descend upon this England? He wondered, and when the shock did come, he was to see men -- who should have been working -- fumbling at the job and getting into clotted groups of gloom and apprehension. A voice was needed, and that voice was to sound its battle cry, the voice of a man whom the English were to disown when fear had slipped from their bellies.

But up at Carter's orchard young women and an old man were at work, and another man watched them from his bed. Sunlight upon vivid foliage, Rachel bringing in with pride, the first early strawberries ripened under glass, red fruit in a clean white punnet.

"Aren't they lovely, Bill?"

He looked at her face.

"Someone is."

"Darling, there are pounds and pounds of them, and Mr. Parkin will take them all. But these are yours."

Early gooseberries too were to be marketed for Whitsun pie, and Rachel and her helpers were hard at work filling two pound punnets. She took the green van to Westings, and Doris went with her, and during her absence Wynter was a worried man. He might have lost his war fears, but an absurd restlessness possessed him when Rachel was on the road. She was so new to the job, and he would lie and listen to car noises on the country road. They passed and passed, but when -- at last -- the van pulled to the white gate, he breathed relief. God, how precious this little wife of his had become to him!

And he had that secret ordeal of his own, and Lovell was the only person who was wise as to it.

"Don't let her know, sir. I managed to shuffle round the room last night."

"What's the idea, Bill?"

"I want -- somehow -- to feel sure that I'm not going to be a useless crock before I tell her. Is there any danger?"

The orchard world was busy, and Lovell, after a glance through the window, half drew the curtains.

"Try it, Bill."

He did not offer to help, but watched Wynter swing his stiff legs out of the bed, and slowly get upon his feet. He stood straight and rigid.

"See, I can stand."

"Try a few steps."

Lovell stood close, watching those spastic movements, ready to help if needs be.

"Good man, that's splendid! Now back to bed. I want to try your reflexes and tactile sense."

Wynter watched that tired, grave face.

"I have a chance, sir?"

"I believe you have. But no adventures, my lad."

"Oh, I'll be damned careful."

"And the idea?"

"Don't you get it?"

"I rather think I do."

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It was on that dreadful day when France fell on her knees and pleaded for peace that Wynter could sense the fear that had penetrated even to this peaceful cottage. Rachel had made some excuse about their little wireless set needing an overhaul, and had removed it. Doris did not sing about this place. Old Tom was sweating silently and grimly with the reaper, and raking the mown grass as a mulch under the trees. It was a serene and sunny day, and Wynter lay and wondered. Did that beloved mate of his think of him as a helpless and frightened child who had to be protected? Let the horror and the terror be; he had an answer of his own for Rachel.

Just before dusk Tom Wilmer came to Wynter's window, and stood there, biting at an empty pipe.

"Well, Bill, old man, how goes it?"

The man on the bed answered with another question.

"So the French have chucked?"

Wilmer's big black head gave a jerk.

"What!"

"True, isn't it?"

"Who told you?"

"No one. Just sensed it."

Wilmer was gripping his pipe.

"Did you, by God! Well, we're in the soup all right. But, damn it, we'll swim, even in the soup."

"How are people taking it?"

"My chaps have been mooching about like a lot of scared kids. Couldn't get on with things. But they'll face up. Coats off, and fight, and fight

like blazes.”

There was a strange smile on Wynter’s face, but Wilmer did not see it.

“ Bill.”

“ Yes, old man ? ”

“ Do you know who has -- taken it best ? ”

“ I could guess.”

“ Yes, that little wife of yours.”

II

It was at the end of June that Wynter heard what he took to be the first German bombers flying in the night sky over Sussex. That evil and menacing drone which was to become so familiar, and productive of a mixture of helpless rage and fear. But William Wynter was preparing his new entry upon the stage, and cherishing it for the beloved heroism of this rustic play. He knew what he knew, that invasion was a possibility, that the army of Dunkirk had returned as a more or less disarmed mob. Youths and oldish men were joining the new Home Guard, and their local equipment consisted of a few shot-guns and two or three sporting rifles. And perhaps people were thinking of him as a poor, paralysed parasite, useless mouth. Well, well, well ! Those secret excursions of his at night were becoming more adventurous. Old Tom, coming in one day to report, was faced with an astonishing request.

“ Tom, not a word to anybody, can you get me a couple of sticks ? ”

“ Sticks, ssir ? ”

“ Yes, walking-sticks, Tom.”

Tom scratched his chin and looked worried.

" I could, ssir, but what be you ---- ? "

" Never mind, Tom, get 'em, and smuggle 'em in here, and put them under the bed."

" What be you up to, ssir ? "

" I've got a surprise. Don't give it away."

" Don't you be for playin' any dangerous tricks, ssir."

" I won't, Tom. And not a word."

III

It happened on the day when Rachel came back with the van from Westings. She was down in the dumps, was Rachel, and for the first time feeling rather desperate about things. Westings was becoming a dead town. People were leaving it, and soldiers were taking their places. Barbed wire along the sea front. The hotels full of khaki. Even Mr. Parkin was depressed, yet determined to stick it out. But what of the sale of fruit and apples ? The apple crop promised to be marvellous.

She put the green van away, and went across to old Tom who was scything a rough corner, and when Tom saw her face his old eyes were soft. Bad news - - what ! Was there any good news these days ? The young mistress looked frightened.

" Oh, Tom."

" Yes, ma'am."

" Westings is going to be almost empty. Mr. Parkin says he is going to stay, but I don't know whether he can take all our apples."

Tom scratched his head.

" Well, apples be apples. People all about the place will be wantin'

apples. Don't 'ee worry."

And then Tom saw that most amazing sight, and stood and stared like some ancient yokel to whom the Angel of the Lord had appeared, for there was Mr. William with two sticks walking in the orchard.

"What is it, Tom?"

"Just you turn, dearie, and look."

For a second or two she stood as though shocked and incredulous, and then, with a spasm of breathlessness, ran to him, calling as she ran.

"Oh, darling, what are you doing ----?"

Old Tom, with a paternal grin, returned to his scything of rough weeds and grass.

Wynter stood quite still, erect yet leaning on his sticks, and watching that approaching and frightened little face. How well he knew that face, and yet how mysterious it was. This was the creature who had been slaving for him in a dozen different ways, bringing him his shaving and washing gear, his meals, his books, making his bed, bending over him at dawn and dusk, and always with a love-look. And now she was frightened for his sake, shocked by some incredible recklessness on his part. In that moment he was almost super-consciously aware of the beauty of it all, the old trees, the old man scything, this white faced anxious girl. Yes, beauty! If one could leave more beauty in the world than one had brought into it, beauty and kindness, the beast in man might yet be mastered.

"Oh, Bill, what are you doing?"

She was close to him now, and he raised his two sticks and flourished them.

"Trying out my new legs, darling."

But as yet she did not understand.

" Oh, Bill, you shouldn't. You may have ---- "

He took two stiff steps to meet her, and let the sticks fall. Tom, taking a peek, saw them holding each other fast.

" Darling, forgive me, but I wanted this surprise for you."

" Oh, Bill, you don't mean ---- ? "

" I've been doing leg-drill at night when you were asleep. I wanted to be a bit sure -- before I gave an exhibition."

Her face was upturned, and after looking at it with profound tenderness, he put his lips to hers.

" There's to the most wonderful mate a man had ever ---- "

She burst into tears.

" Is it true, Bill, is it really true ? "

" Look, I'll have a shot without the sticks. Let go, darling, for a moment."

She stood back, and watched him, as he took six deliberate and stiff-legged paces, and then he wobbled slightly, and she rushed to him.

" Not too much. Hold fast to me."

" My God, won't I ! But I can do it. Just like a small kid learning to walk."

IV

Most modern women appear to rush to the telephone when any exciting and emotional event has happened, but as yet Carter's Orchard had no telephone, and Rachel would not have rushed to it had there been one. So much more profound was her reaction, that, having made William sit down -- with her hands steadying him -- on the orchard grass, she

rushed into the cottage, saw the empty bed, buried her face in his pillow, and gave a silent thanks to God. And there Doris found her, a Doris who had been busy pinching off the sideshoots from tomatoe plants in the glass-house.

“ Oh, Rachel -- what’s happened ? ”

Rachel turned on her knees.

“ Look out of the window.”

And Doris looked, and saw William Wynter sitting on the grass close to the netted strawberries.

“ Gosh ! ” said Doris, “ Did he ---- ? ”

“ Yes, walked there. Isn’t it wonderful ? ”

Doris went down on her knees beside her friend and hugged her.

“ Oh, darling, I’m so glad. But how ---- ? ”

“ He’s been saving it up for me.”

“ Just how ? ”

“ Getting up at night, and making himself walk about the room.”

Then, the obvious thing appealed to Doris.

“ Well, I call that tremendous. Better make his bed, Rachel, hadn’t we ? I’ll help.”

“ Yes, clean sheets. And Mr. Snape stopped me in the village. He wants strawberries.”

“ That sour old berry ! Letting him have them ? ”

“ Yes. It all helps.”

“ Well, we’ll pick. Just a mo, darling. I must go out and give Bill one.”

Dr. Lovell, taking Carter's Orchard on his country round, pulled in at the white gate, and sat for some seconds contemplating that picture, a man sitting in a Windsor chair, watching two girls bus among the strawberries. Well, well, well ! Nature and man appeared to be confounding the prophets, and Balaam's Ass was a creature of eternal significance, chastening the conceits of man.

Dr. Lovell lit a cigarette. This might be one of those brief interludes in an over-worked man's day when refreshment came to him in the contemplation of peaceful things, human beauty unravaged by the powers of evil. During these tense and dreadful days Frank Lovell had become something of a mystic, and a belief in the Devil, or a Devil. In the months that were to come he was to hear bombs crash in this little English town, and go forth to help in the salving of bloody and ravaged bodies. And what of the Soul ? Would the Soul of England endure, and grow great in tribulation, and somehow keep its kindness in spite of bitter, belching demagogues ? Yet, for the moment this little human scene was sufficient, two girls picking strawberries, and a resurrected man sitting in a chair.

Resurrection ! Yes, how profound in its ultimate meaning was that word. Man crucified by man, yet rising again with the marks of his ordeal upon him, a figure of mystery, who -- please God -- might transcend politics. The doctor got slowly out of his car, and strolled unobserved across the orchard grass. He saw that man's chair had a cushion in it. And was not that woman's most human privilege, to bear children and supply cushions, and to keep her tongue and temper sweet in spite of the drudgeries and dish-cloths. But damn it, how old fashioned some of the moderns might think him. Poor old Sop !

Nor had the three of them heard his car. The girls' backs were turned to

him, and so was the man's. He strolled up behind William Wynter's chair.

" Well, my lad, how are cushions ? "

Wynter's head swung round.

" Hullo, doc. Ask Rachel -- there."

The two girls had risen, and Lovell thought that he had never seen a more appealing face -- in its happiness -- than Rachel's.

" Oh, Dr. Lovell. He walked."

" A kind of miracle, my dear. No, I claim no glory."

He saw the way that William and Rachel Wynter looked at each other. Within them lay the thing that was miraculous, and let anyone call him a sentimental fool for believing in some simple, human sanctities.

- 40 -

William Wynter could remember reading certain words of Balzac's, "From the girl of twenty you get nothing, from the woman of forty -- everything."

Assuredly every generalisation must be allowed its exceptions, and to Wynter his little wife was the supreme exception, yet emphasising the generalisation. Youth wanted to be youth, without being wholly wise as to what it wanted. It was absorbed in its own youngness, and the urge to express that youngness. Its very self-consciousness was so over conscious that its eyelashes flickered and its face expressed hypersensitive hauteur if strange man looked at it. Some of these young madames were so over-charged with self that everything might be considered invertably theirs, and man a mere mirror and a shop-window.

So, why -- Rachel ? Why her care of him that was almost sacrificial ? Domestic chores, the crude duties of a nurse, washing up and washing him, and all done with a kind of tender gaiety. Was it because she had suffered, been loveless, persecuted ? But -- that -- according to the psychologists -- should have produced something sullen or neurotic. Well, well, well ! And what of his own reactions ? Was he supremely complacent ? Did he assume that he must be a fascinating fellow, and that he had married a sweet and devoted slave ? He did not. That which he too had suffered had produced in him a profound humility. Why should she do all of this for him, show such courage and capacity ? Was not the answer very simple ? She was to him just what he wished to be to her.

II

Day by day, helping himself with his two sticks, he walked stiff-legged round the orchard, and each day he added a little to the distances he could cover. And Rachel watched him, not obviously or interferingly, but with the eyes of a woman watching over some beloved child. Poor darling, he was being so brave about things, just as he thought the same of her. Would those legs of his lose their spastic rigidity? And as she watched him day by day, it seemed to her that his movements were becoming more fluid.

Lovell was with her one morning at the window, and her eyes were on the doctor's face.

"Distinct improvement, Rachel. No doubt about it."

She drew a deep breath.

"I thought so too. It's just -- wonderful."

Moreover, William Wynter was assigning himself small jobs. He fed the chickens. He had a corner of the fruit house turned into an office, for official fuss was developing, and Carter's Orchard was a registered entity for food production. Accounts had to be kept and returns rendered. He helped with the washing up, in spite of protests from Rachel and Doris.

"I like it. So what?"

Then came the day when he sat beside Rachel in the van, and travelled with her to Westings. She drove so carefully. Did he realise that she was acutely nervous? That frail body of his must not be involved in any clash.

Mr. Parkin, wearing his gent's boater, came out to congratulate him.

"Well, this is fine!"

"Thanks to everybody's kindness. How are things?"

Mr. Parkin grinned.

" Oh, just a bit so-so. What can you expect ? But I'm going through with it. I'm staying here, and damn Hitler."

But perhaps the most memorable evenings for William was one when he and Rachel wandered arm in arm under the apple trees. Almost it was like a marriage progress with apples for orange blossom. Old Tom's optimism had proved itself. Apples, apples, apples, green and gold and crimson flushed. Codlins, Blenheim's, Bramleys, Worcesters, and the old nameless breeds flaunting their colour and their abundance. Wynter was walking without his sticks and not leaning upon woman, save in the spirit. His legs were becoming legs, not semi-mechanised appendages.

" What a crop, darling. Can we sell it all ? "

" We can," said she.

" And pick it ? "

" Doris and Jess and I, and old Tom."

He held her close.

" And someone named William Wynter."

" Not yet, Bill, dear."

" We'll see."

III

September, that lovely month and so unlovely in its menace. Terror flying by night and by day ; distant crashes, distant gunfire a faint crackling up in the high azure of the sky. The Few were fighting the Many for the soul and body of Britain. Men looked at each other and shirked, asking that fateful question. Would they come, that grey horde, dropping out of the sky, or swarming on the beaches ?

Wynter never forgot that serene September afternoon when he saw in the cloudless sky above a flight of German planes cruising with impudent casualness. Now and again a pathetic and solitary shell-burst broke like a silver bubble somewhere near to them. They paid no heed to it, those filmy war-dragons, but floated on as though the English sky was theirs, and the victorious explicit inevitable.

"Damn you," said Wynter, hating his very helplessness.

IV

It was he who lay awake at night, listening. Rachel was sleeping with him now, in the cottage parlour, and sleep came easier to her than to him. Was it that she was more weary, or that she was more at peace with life in having so much that she desired? He would see her little face dim and serene beside him, and he, restless and fearful for her sake, would wonder whether this world of theirs would crash in chaos. Germans picking his apples. No, her apples. And would they be fugitives in the green van? And would the roads be open to them?

The Home Guard would be out, watching. Oh, hell, why could he not be with those other men, farm-folk and shop-men, lads and veterans. Poor old London. And here was this little wife of his calmly asleep beside him as though something in her knew that all would be well with her world.

V

Almost it would seem that fear acted upon him both as sedative and a stimulant. Big Tom Wilmer, now a sergeant in the Home Guard, asserted that

fear was one of life's necessities, and that without it mediocre man became a drone. But for fear, would the English countryside be coming into its own again, and if the fear of God had passed from the world, some other fear was needed. Even Hitler might be a figure of fate, compelling a lazy country to take its coat off and sweat blood. Tom Wilmer had no illusions about labour in the mass. Did it not call cold weather "Master's Weather" because it had to work to keep warm. What a strange illusion that the community must not serve the master-mind!

But at Carter's Orchard it was apple harvest, and these old trees were becoming autocrats. "You despised me, did you? What now? We are more important than soap-boxes and gabble." Mr. Parkin, staying put where lesser men had fled, was a buyer of every apple that could be picked. Even Army cook-houses asked for apples. And prices were going up. William Wynter, with his account book before him, began to realise that this orchard of his might be a living gold mine.

They had one old pear tree on the place, a smother of fruit, and that one tree earned them thirty pounds.

Apples, apples, apples, piled in great brown baskets, or laid out on shelves.

Wynter, with those legs of his growing more competent and supple, remembered the words of his physician.

"Lose yourself in an apple tree."

Could he not alter that saying?

"Find yourself in an apple tree."

Yes, and in an Eve who was not mere Eve.

All three girls had grown clever in placing and climbing ladders, with old Tom as tutor and supervisor, but Wynter was not liking Rachel up in an

apple tree.

“ Leave it to Doris, and Jess and Old Tom.”

Sentimental fellow !

“ But I love picking, Bill.”

“ Well, take the easy ones.”

But it was man who was to receive the tender reproof and to answer it. “ Bramleys ” were weighing down the branches, and Mr. Parkin was asking for Bramleys, and the whole picking squad turned out in force, and were as vociferous as sparrows. William Wynter had been left in the office, but about eleven o'clock he ventured forth, a step-ladder on one shoulder, and a half-bushel basket under his other arm. He was in the sinful act of opening his step-ladder when Doris saw him.

“ Oh -- Rachel, look, Bill's over there -- picking apples.”

Rachel came down her ladder with a rush, leaving her hooked basket on a rung. That forbidden husband of hers daring to pick fruit.

“ Oh, Bill, what are you doing ? ”

“ Just a job of work, darling.”

“ You mustn't.”

He laughed at her serious, shocked face.

“ Something has gone out of my back, darling. Don't worry. I won't stand on top of the steps.”

She gave a wise and considering look.

“ Just pick the easy ones, Bill.”

He smiled at her.

“ Something may have gone out of my back, darling, but someone will never go out of my heart.”

And old Tom Lavender, overhearing that sentimental saying, chuckled to himself.

Beauty & The Beast.

Wm. D. Deering

Copy of Original Courtesy of

Sir Reginal Worthington

I

It was a grey & dreary day in June. I had been down in the west country where the weather had been kind to me, & both sea & sky had been full of colour, but if it rained between Slough & Paddyton I could swear that no man had the right to grumble. For modern man in a messy tent, & there is too much of him, & there fifteen miles or so of identical hideousness & spalar might come any artist to question the sanity of the ~~modern man~~ ^{modern man} sense of the ultimate value. If it rained & saw it did in provincial speech upon that strip of spalar, - what matter? Old Pobbitt, had he ridden through that section of Middlesex, where as much as green fields had been, would I can swear - have cursed most freely & rightly over the beam that had bent & aged & time and for good earth. I looked out of the window & marvelled, & the strangest part of it was that modern man might not be aware of the deplorable mess he himself was making.

So, we came to Paddyton ^{station}. I had helped an old lady down with her suitcase & I, after lowering of her from the rack, & moved into the corridor to find myself blocked by the inconspicuous back of a tumbler "Shind". He had been standing in the corridor, smoking a very foul pipe, & blotting out a part of the landscape - such as it was. A room varied blade had found him, & they were arguing as to the employment of a porter. Then did they appear to be conscious of the gathering queue behind them.

I said - "Do you mind letting me pass."

The man turned a boogey face on me. He had angry, insolent eyes.

"You can wait your turn, can't you?"

I bawled down at him.

"If you would adjoin the debate we should have a better chance in the time given."

They got at 'head of us, & they did not hurry. The blade made some reference to noisy snobs. Ahead the time given was twenty yards long, & to emphasize the situation a delay was caused, though a wind-damaged roof & floor in the place

where the queue should have continued. I found myself behind the travelling two, & within a yard of the water-splash. An respectable young constable who was in charge of operations, strolled down & directed the latter crowd to form up on the edge of the platform. He was in the roadway.

Torvi was exceptionally slow in arriving. About an a minute rolled down the ramp into the station. People were restless. The travelling fellow in front of me kept pivoting & staring at me; he appeared to be irritated in the.

He growled - "Rotten slow this. He ought to do this better now we've got rid of the snobs."

His attitude in my face was a challenge. Old School I was a little that! I smiled down at him. I saw his feet too to his feet just as so, & so far as I was concerned he could argue that he & his crowd owned the earth. Then, I happened to glance at those who formed the head of the platform queue, & I saw - her.

She seemed to stand a little apart, tall & striking & slender, & in profile, a profile that made me think of Botticelli. She was wearing a little gold beaded earring and a head of glorious chestnut hair, & an antique bronze coloured frock, a new-look frock. Her eyes were hazel. An old brown suitcase waited beside her. I had a feeling that she was not very conscious of the crowd, & did not wish to be conscious of it. She stood quite still, alone & remote, though her face was no marble mask, but as finely treated as a Chinese one. There was something un-English about her.

Our queue moved forward very slowly & periodically. Satchels & bags were lifted & lowered. The delight from the roof continued, as did the growling of the train ahead of me. It would appear that they had not enjoyed their holiday. And what were their British Railways doing about that railway roof, & the lack of Torvi, & the weather? As we shuffled on I lost sight of the lovely Botticelli at the head of the other queue. If the cheer & glow of the ^{new} was that of a Vienna or Vienna, what did she think of our English scene?

People were leaving the queue, but those who had heavy luggage were compelled to remain. I saw the police constable stroll across towards the double file on the edge of the platform. There was space for more travellers between our tail & the water-splash, & a section of the other queue.

joined up with us. A very old lady stepped up on my left. She was shabbily gay as though covered with cobwebs, & her back was as rounded in the back of someone who had suffered from a tubercular spine. She had a face of parchment, spectacles, & one of those contraptions for the very deaf. I became aware of an odour that suggested decay, stale flesh, stale clothes. Statute of Dignity, & the slowish of the very old who were too weary to wait.

Yet another odour drifted from another quarter, a fragrance that was out of the flesh. I turned & found a young girl standing beside me.

Now - I - as a somewhat successful painter of portraits, & sensitive to temperament in the sitter, my art drew an unnumbered in the young woman. I am afraid that in my art I was an utterly hesitating, a pictorial power, & no exponent of an aim. I had seen no reason why beauty should not be beauty, a judge with a keen of reacting about it & to be rendered as one saw it - felt it, & not as physiognomy. Even a photo. can possess beauty, real beauty, with the other is capable of suffering the subject to express itself, sea & sky, woodland, a story landscape, or some remarkable house. Did any man see the By his scene more surely & completely than Constable, & did Rembrandt give his ladies the face & egg-cup eyes? So the Botticelli girl had a peculiar beauty, a loveliness that was more than mere perfection in the flesh.

Now was the chieftain alone. The little stock and in front of me had turned to stare at her. Gosh, she was a beauty, a creature who stimulated the crude male in him. He began to exhibit himself, & to assert his maleness by expressing the impatient repugnance of these tired people. What a silly show! His crude blue eyes invited the beauty to agree with him. He was some fellow - what! I knew he must have become conscious of the frank distaste with which I was observing him, & once again he glared at my stamp of the.

Next page.

He began to shut off, a cutting off to want half by expunging the ~~part~~ of a ~~hand~~ of those tired people. What a show! His bag in you invited the lady to ~~quit~~ him. He was ~~some~~ fellow, what? I saw he was, I saw right the ~~frank~~ ~~chit~~ ~~ate~~ with which I was observing him, a nice fellow ~~de~~ ~~glared~~ at my ~~stomach~~ ~~the~~.

I smiled & he looked embarrased.

"What's the go, ~~Smile~~?"

I - ~~in~~ ~~turn~~ - looked at him.

"Princedial pyrechei, sa, I suppose."

I don't seem to pay him, & he could find no ~~retort~~. He turned his back on me, & I - glancing at my Botheville, saw her as remote as was, & I ~~glared~~ ~~stomach~~ ~~the~~ ~~little~~ ~~card~~ ~~hat~~. It was a ~~card~~ ~~green~~, & had a ~~little~~ ~~red~~ feather stuck in its hat-band.

I was still ~~glared~~. I had stood here for half an hour, & I ~~was~~ ~~down~~ ~~the~~ ~~four~~, ~~supper~~ ~~men~~ ~~just~~ ~~old~~ ~~lady~~ ~~hairs~~ ~~one~~ ~~could~~ ~~under~~ ~~it~~. I calculated that at the present rate of flow we might be here another half hour. People were getting better, ~~more~~ of them left the green ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~hat~~, but ~~these~~ ~~with~~ ~~baggage~~ ~~had~~ ~~to~~ ~~remain~~. I saw that had hit a cigarette & its smoke drifted into my nostrils. I am a pipe-smoker, with a particular predilection for ~~second~~ ~~hand~~ ~~smoke~~, especially so when it emanates from ~~pleasant~~ ~~mouths~~. I took off my hat & fanned the smoke away.

The daylight I made played upon the little card ~~neck~~, & he turned to me.

"What's the idea?"

"I don't like second-hand smoke."

"Oh, don't you? Well, you keep your hat to yourself. - I don't like daylight."

I smiled at him, & went on fanning. And suddenly he blew up, & grabbed a sentence.

"Come over, let's get out of this, & find up a town outside."

They sat out, & he shuffled up a place.

He said to me that I must have had a pretty solid sentence of ~~my~~ ~~own~~, & I turned to the old lady.

"Wouldn't you like to sit in this?"

She gave me a ~~smile~~ ~~glance~~, a grateful glance.

"Thank you so much. I would."

I angled it for him, & she squatted a ~~begin~~ ~~to~~ ~~chatter~~ ~~to~~ ~~me~~.

I could have said to her from old ~~times~~. Say he it was ~~physiognomy~~.

I glared at my Botheville, & for the first time I met his eye.

Say you were a ~~smoke~~ ~~smoke~~.

We started to shuffle forward at minute intervals, & I kept making dates for the old dance. She ~~started~~ ^{went on} to chatting to me, but I was still showing my right hand neighbour. What was the purpose? And what was she? Not Barbara as my fiancée, & certainly not Sabitt Bell, or ~~Priscilla~~. My opinion was that she was not quite as high, but rather Vienna or Florence. How time was driving, I was now had only two people ahead of me.

I turned to the old lady.

"Are you going to ~~the~~ ^{by my chair} going to Waterloo?"

"No, I'm going to ~~the~~ ^{the} Crown."

"Well, you take my turn. I'm a bit of a great hurry."

She looked at me like a grateful bird.

"How kind you've been."

Had I? Her turn came, & the young policeman helped her into the taxi. He gave me a friendly smile.

"You're next, sir."

I was very pretty & nice today. - I wonder if I can give any book a lift ~~to~~ ^{to} Waterloo.

She looked at me & said "Bothered."

"Any more to you, Miss?"

She seemed to hesitate for a second or two, & I ~~added~~ ^{said}

"I shall be glad to see you to Waterloo."

"If you prefer it - take the next ^{one} on your own."

She looked at me.

"I am for Waterloo. - May I?"

"By, yes, if you can part up with me."

Her eyes had a strange look but she smiled, & her voice reassured me. She was not quite as high, & had a deeper flavour, & a delicate smoothness. I opened the door of the taxi for her, & passed ^{my own} the suitcase to the driver.

"Waterloo station, please."

"Right-o, sir," & he gave me a friendly grin.

I got in & closed the door. How little did I realize that in sharing a taxi with her I had opened a door to a whole series of coincidences.

It would have pleased me to have experienced a drive in a Victorian Hansom cab, & I could have pictured her in such a vehicle, wearing some lovely & voluminous frock, & a hat of flowing distinction. There was a certain authority about the straight back which she was wearing, & for the first part of the drive I saw nothing but her profile. Her legs lay in the lap, her hands folded upon it, ~~her~~ ^{her} fingers lay against each other with the nails untainted. Was she people conscious? I rather

thought not. I had a curious feeling that she carried within her some poignant, dark eye that subverted the lesser virtues. Her perfectness seemed without force. I could ask myself whether any burden was heavier than such peace with her. And what justification had I for being so inquisitive? Well, it is not man's natural duty - woman? I - who was so sensitive to beauty with the other sex - should know that; I - whose appreciation had been so quick a universal that I had not mated with finally. I - a partner of fair women, - explain me - for that matter, a somewhat successfully no; - I - the athlete with a fresh conception of physical beauty, the runner, swimmer, boxer!

Our dinner took to the Park. We had been sitting beside each other with courteous civilities, & we had not exchanged a word. Now we lay silent upon her, & we were both of us back of the fair face. I was conscious of the same sense of restraint in her. Her ill-hatred towards man.

She, without looking at me, she said with quiet resolution -
"I seem to have seen you before."

I had noticed, tucked into her bag, the folded copy of a colorful periodical. Well, in a sense she had. My photo. happened to be in that magazine.

She gave my oblique smile & touched the magazine.

"Here."

"You have observation."

She did not blanch. "Well, just that of that!" She sat saying at the back of the tawny red neck. He needed a hair cut.

"I saw one of your private shows, Mr. Byrnes."

"Well, the introduction has been somewhat singular, but it is not yet complete."

Her glance had dropped to her hands, & for the first time I realized that they were ringless.

"Is that - necessary?"

Again that note of remote hostility. Her sentence was lying there with the label visible, & I glanced at it & then at her.

"Permission granted?"

"Don't - matter."

I turned the label over & read

"Solda Mallory
Paddyton & Dataloo."

She now seemed to crown her like the little gold cap upon her glorious head of hair. Solda? Ah, I had

perched the Sallow as dark a mysterious creature. Yet, resting on this. And Mallory? An English adaptation?

"Thank you" I said, "that for - she knew each other now."

Once more she was people to me, a slightly so. She for a no further? He was leaving her in the background. I placed at her for she seemed more remote than ever. Should I dare to test her spirit again? I was still doubtful when we arrived.

I opened the door for her, & she was out in one swift movement. I lifted out her case. She was going to her bag.

"No need" I said - "the pleasure has been mine."

She - I felt how obvious was the chink. She took the suitcase from me, & I raised my hat to her.

"Goodbye, Miss Mallory."

She gave me one quick, smiling glance, & walked away, & I said to myself - "I suppose that is where this ends."

I turned to pick up the dress, & found her regarding me with fairly but paternal amusement. Most certainly the "Sally" was not coming, & I could put the small change in my pocket.

II

All that I could remember was the ^{for the moment} sight & height of him as he had walked off with his suitcase, & I had a ^{feeling of having been} completely rebuffed, which perhaps was good for me. My experience with women had been otherwise, & it was I who often had had to rebuke the ladies. So that a catch 'em if you can, let it pass, for my vanity. I had now to be candidly clear.

So far as I was concerned she was lost in the station crowd, & I supposed that I should never see her again. Some at first night after a drive in a taxi, & love lost in a holiday spirit! I was sufficiently modern to pay at such moments, & yet I was wondering whether any woman had attracted me as she had done, both the artist & the man in me. Even her name had made music in the air, & she had promised for me a cigarette that had the strange allure of a gainful prelude to Smith & Snodgrass. So's motive rounded in my head as I made my way to the ticket office.

I'll confess that I looked for ^{her} a long time after to spare, wandering up & down in search of that golden cage of a woman's head. No luck! Well, it was just a case of ^{her} being that far in the night, & I made my way to the platform & had my first class ticket clipped.

She had not yet got in & suddenly I saw her standing by the platform light, with her suitcase at her feet. So, she was taking the same train as I was, & somehow I got a strange feeling of inevitability. As I walked ^{just as} suddenly I felt shy of her, I - the man of the world who had had his share of adventure. I walked slowly towards her. She was looking at the train standing by the opposite platform, & once again she was all people to me.

I walked by her.

"So - the conscious creature. My Sappho for taking advantage of it?"

She gave me a quick, oblique glance, & I could not flatten myself that it was friendly. Two fingers were sticking about the platform with bobbing heads, & she appeared to become more interested in them than in me. Did she think that I had followed her deliberately?

particular

S said - "I forgive me, but it is - a coincidence. I thought we were
 > hope that had joined in the night." ~~I could hardly believe it~~

suspected

She continued to watch the ~~picnics~~ ~~Did it not seem to her~~ ~~as if she~~
~~while on the way the captain~~ ~~was passing~~

"I can't help being on the same platform, Miss Malley. Your
 train appears to be my train."

S began to feel rather foolish. She was so much more the
 victim of the situation than S was master of it, if only a
 distantly so. Was she the tough product of three difficult days,
 with a fallacious & mysterious softness under physical make-up.
 Then one train came rolling in, & she picked up her suitcase, &
 S - mine. S saw her move towards a third class carriage, &
 S followed her.

When the captain had emptied itself of a collection of
 hobo's, leaving the floor filthy with cigarette ends, etc, she
 climbed in, & S followed her. S offered to put her suitcase
 in the rack, but she did it herself with a grateful eye. S
 chatted with mine, & sat down opposite her. She had taken
 a mirror from her bag, & was looking at herself in it, though
 her perfect complexion needed no aid.

S said - "Must I apologise for continuing the coincidence.
 Her retort was - "Does the illustration Mr Bryan travel
 third?"

S smiled at her.

"On this occasion, yes. - Unless -"

"You are somewhat persistent."

"By it offends you I'll go elsewhere."

She gave a little shiver of the shoulders & put her mirror
 away.

"To a point - it may amuse me."

S got the meaning of the rather uncertainly. Colossal
 aesthetic right to be expected to be normal play-boys, & put
 one degree removed from sexual code. Yet, somehow S had a
 feeling that there was more to it than that. S took up the
 challenge.

"Please let it amuse you. As you know - I paint portraits."

"May I?"

"Yes."

"And of my race."

"I do."

"What mean - I suppose, Mr Bryan, that you are considered to
 have a plan for the future?"

S was getting the best of it, but S parried.

"Certainly, but only if the subject interests me."

She gave me a quick, naive look.

"Am I supposed to infer?"

"You may. I would very much like to paint a particular portrait."

I was given a Mona Lisa smile.

"Portrait of an obscure young man in a third class compartment, by the first class Mrs Robert Byron."

Certainly I was getting the worst of it.

"Art for art's sake, Miss Mallory. That old platitudes is not always wrong."

"And how would Miss Third Class pay for it?"

"Just as it will be painted for pleasure."

"Given mankind ideas of pleasure, Mrs Byron, my art will be named."

She had remarked me. Other people were getting in, & she seemed to sink into her corner & draw a screen round her. She extracted the magazine, opened it, & used it as a screen. I filled it with a page. She said what now contained such people, combed, too tough looking, middle aged women who hit cigarettes, & an old couple in the first class who looked as though they were back from a holiday. I had dropped from the darkness. I reached a window where Phyllis Mallory had come whether she was going. And why the hostility? Was I personally responsible for it, or had she some bitter grievance against me? Had Maggie had all of her hair cut? Had she the little gold cap & a coat of hair. I observed her hands, slender & sensitive, yet strong, & her legs were like her hands & the brain & body. Her hair was of grey waves, & she looked shabby. She had won the one & the same & taste of words, & I found a quick & vivid regard in her, & a bright regard in these deep, dark days. No easy, drifting mission this, but to my feeling my such woman who might have given me reason for wishing to be alone with her. I had not met her from the world of women. No sign in her figure, & certainly one troubling belief in her tower, for more of her own whom she chose to go.

The whistle blew & the train moved off. I looked out of the window at all that my brain reached yet more up by the next grey sky & distant stained water left by the rain. I could suspect the conveyors of these London who had endured such losses, & yet wonder how they could be such decent folk into what to me was a hell of hideous intention. I found myself at a table that somehow furnished me, an old Dickon there, part

of which had wanted some for the sloping walls a step which ^{had} led to
 lower which were no longer there. Some steps a short house? I could
 picture some returning within ignorant of the tragedy, coming in the darkness
 to those familiar steps a climbing them to find nothing. Where were
 they, with all that memory a thin human presence? Did not patterns
 survive in the fine scheme, a more those wanted lower still existing
 in some other dimension?

The taxi rolled on, a turning of head I recognized her looking at me
 with appearing a swiftly eye. I think I smiled at her, a gain
 the messenger went off. Her face vanished like those houses.

One of the tough lads addressed me.

"Can we have the window down a bit?"

"Certainly."

I lowered it three inches.

"Will that do?"

"Thank you. Horrible weather for the time of year."

"It is."

And that one conversation ended.

But I was thinking of something else. How will she get out?
 Soubertan? She ^{did} not come with Soubertan. And what is
 her job in life? To my way of feeling she might have been
 anything from a member of a ^{young} profession - to a film-star
 who ^{get} that was not a star. Soubertan's secretary? Hardly so.
 Courtier or "honey-dresser"? But the quiet faith with which
 she had out-topped me did not seem to accord with
 such activities.

I smoked my pipe & looked out of the window, but I was
 strangely conscious of her presence. That she was no cheap model
 whose culture did not extend below her clothes was more
 more obvious to me. And what was her history, her background?
 Had she - like so many women - suffered from some near-tyranny
 & been frozen by it into a profound mistrust of man? I
 should not have described her as hard, any more than a flower
 can be described as hard, & yet she had built for herself a
 fine & delicate shell which only under violence could crack.
 Yes, under violence, or a spiteful comprehension & integrity.

Soubertan, & she did not move. She had dropped her
 messenger upon her back, & gazed steadily out of the window.
 I caught one of the toughs giving her with apical hostility.
 She stood on the Tyndal she had the faded gift of beauty
 which could have been an antagonist the general sort of

number. I stared at her from time to time, & I cannot explain why Caprice came to me with the feeling that there was something about her, & that her very appearance carried anxiety & fear. She might never show fear, but I could divine it.

Wichfield - my station - was the next one. I knocked out my pipe & threw it away. Then I saw her folding up her magazine & tucking it into her bag.

Good God, was she getting out at my station?

She then slowed down. I stood up, & lifted down my suitcase. She did not move. So, Wichfield was not her station, & here the adventure ended.

I opened the door, got out, & raised my hat to her, & reclosed the door. I had walked some twenty yards when some one's glance made me look back. She was getting out of the carriage with her suitcase. She had waited for me to go, so as to close the door upon my more confidence.

I walked out of the station & found Bill waiting for me with the car, & somehow I was glad of his great good-humored face.

"Glad to see you back, sir."

"Glad to be back, Bill."

I did not dare say further catch, but as we drove away I saw her appear with her suitcase, & stand waiting. Was her car coming for her, or would a Wichfield train save her pursuit?

(After Page 11)

I wonder how I am going to like this place?

My window has plenty of view, but up is a kind of slated gable
which the Victorians considered to be good. The meadow &
the river, & the Down of yards, a glaze of sky.

Mr. Howard may have looked rather a pirate, but he seems considerate,
& knew that I should cooperate. I shall to a point. He was to be
both smart & affable. And there should be good many here
if one has the right sort of smile for the elderly gentleman who
wants to feel his own party.

Yes, may be to be ^{revised} for - for. I think she is the only
completely clear thing I have in the world. She doesn't have to
experience some of her mother's problems. I'm pretty tough now, & life
isn't a fun game.

I was rather amused by the dog's adventure. I suppose ^{my}
woman would have got a thrill from travelling with the celebrated
Mr. Robert Byron. I think I look ^{to} know it. However, he has cultivated a good method of approach, the bristled
sky dog idea. He accords with decor & a kind of gentlemanly
equanimity. Oh, damn me! I think nothing can be so tolerable
as this.

I have been all over the house, & it's decor is rather
clever. The bar pleases me with its coloured glass, & air
of seductive gaiety. Here I shall provide. I am to dispense
drinks & allow, fly doctor at times, & exercise general
charm. In fact Mr. Howard admits that he held a kind
of glamour parade before I was selected.

Can I plaited? No, I know enough about men.

And Major Harold Howard? Rather a business - I might.
Eat a plaid & full of manner. Might have played a part
in "Better Served" - or "The White Horse Inn". Oh, Victoria,
city of shadows & madness! I think I know how to manage a
man like Howard. Complete calmness, casual charm, a grip now
& again from the tips of your tongue.

We had dinner together, quite friendly & conversational. He dropped
some hints to me. "The Meadows" is to be a super-play house
for the wealthy. What kind of play? - I have seen the
Card-room. It has a rather & heavy curtain. Howard seems
pretty confident about the whole business. I wonder?

Only a part of the story has been told. The city is
Pohio, the city of the future - no more. I shall tell the story
in the future, but not now.

I am afraid nothing shall be done. She will be
the only one.

Howard gives me a piece of a book.

See Ryan was a man - not a boy.

I hope the ^{little} boy is not going to be a philosopher.

I have written to Peter a long letter. I shall have to be
careful about the letter. Part of it is too private.

I believe the child will be happy with these good people.

Are there any good people?

I suppose there must be, or the world would have
no more.

4. *glowing white house.*

"The house with a *country* view."
 "I said to Bill - 'What the hell? It's a house!'"

He pulled up. The house had been the house of, in essence, old down who had cultivated etc. I ^{that} knew it had been up for sale, & I had not thought much about it, ^{the matter} not ^{certainly} I had not ^{known} the ^{invention}. I was amazed. I did not welcome one of the new firm's ^{higher} ^{down} about on my doorstep.

"But going I think, no."
 "Pretty good work. - Who's responsible."
 "Gentleman of the name of *Howwood*, I think, no."
 "Howwood. - But here the road of, I, Bill. By people there yet?"

"Only the stuff, no, as far as I know."
 He turned up, & the old house welcomed me. It stood there in *Sutton* *Witcham*, with a green open of *grass* sloping to the river, with its two great cedars ^{behind} it. I had christened them *God* & *My* *God*. And what a craftsman's house it was with its *beautiful* *brickwork* mellow, a *serene*, its *mantelpiece* a *sting* *corner*, its *lovely* *cables*, *lathings*, a *light* *clustered* *chairs* & *reclining* *sofa*. A *golden* *home*, *ingrained*, a *still* *gesture* to me.

That *Hartfield* had *known* *tragedy* was a matter of history, & seemed to *figure* in its name. *What* *Hart-field*? There was no bit of *whistleblowing* here, & I had often wondered whether the *Hurt* was *valid* or had been *changed* from *Hart* or *Heart*. Some *shed* of *human* *agony*, & which was the *field* that had *suffered* *stage* *page*. But now the old house seemed to *stand* in a *little* *island* of *peace*, *look* *out* over the *river* & the *meadow*, & with the *great* *cedars* *like* *beasts* or *guard* *men* *it*.

And if the name recalled

When I returned home I had a *feeling* of *existing* in *another* *world*, a *world* in which *real* & *hell* *dreamed* *dream* & *ghost* *walked* & *children* *were* *told* *fairytale* *stories*, a *world* of *William* *Shakespeare*, *Edmund* *Sparrow* & *Phil* *Marlowe*. I had *read* *Malloy* *here*, & *hinted* *to* *Wagon*, & *idealized* a *possible* & *fairytale* *stone* with *William* *Marlowe*. The *material* *will* could *mean* *any* *thing*, a *system* *return* to *my* *road*, & *things* *miraculous* *seemed* *ready* to *manifest* *when* *the* *room* *stare*. Every *room* had *association* of *its* *own*. *Queen* *Bea* had *slipped* in *my* *room*. From a *chamber* *down* the *gallery* *San* *Regis* *Salomon* had *been* *hauled* *at* *night* *to* *be* *tried*, *condemned* & *beheaded* by *Cornwall*. The *ghost* *room* of *Anne* *Murill* who had *demanded*

myself in the main was meant to mine, & so that I found that I had made some for it. Poor, pretty Anne was supposed to walk the house, & like any old hand I was full of good advice at night. In fact I am one of those who believe that the very walls of a house should have something of a personality, a character, then like environment which ^{may} affect those who are sensitive.

I had bought some of the furniture with the house, two four-poster beds, ^{laminated} oak coffee & capboards, a bookcase, a chest, some old armchairs & a wing, a cane bed, a table, & a hand-cherry, one or two pictures, a stuffy couch. I had added to the garnish, & some the house was oak, & mostly panelled in that wood, I had kept it oak with its main details, tables, chairs, etc. It had a gynaecology ^{which had been} plant installed by a previous owner, & I was not so content as to live with Candler. Also, the panelled parlour did print two large chairs & a sofa to face the fire, & seemed off in one corner was my piano.

Then, I was fortunate in my staff, Bill & Betty, a young married couple. Betty was a very little creature, & an excellent cook. Bill had been badly shocked about in the war, & was glad of a job which was not too strenuous, & a place in which he was considered. Old Mrs. Moby came in from a neighbouring cottage & helped Betty, & a gardener named Tom Potter ^{was} helped Bill with the garden. For, in the difficult modern world I was a velvet, & quite the feudal person, but if any enemy of mine ^{arose} concluded that I had not gone soft, he might well have been disillusioned.

a Cider

As I have said I cultivated physical fitness, & after sitting about all day I felt the need for exercise. I could get into my out-fitted shop & go walking, or some more shadow-boxing in the studio when a pinch-bell had been heard. Or, I could trot round John Stager's farm when he allowed me to run where I pleased. I went upstairs & changed into shorts & a ^{little} blue vest & followed. The window of my room looked out over the main & the meadow, & the ^{whole} of daylight was upon them.

I met Betty at the foot of the oak staircase.

"Dear as usual, no?"

"Yes, Betty. How have you been?"

"Slowly, sir. The Stage was not very large, a stage 48 ft. x 8 ft. about. But you want more detail?"

Her little, sharp face looked up at me. She was a capable creature, & I will back her word for anything.

"What about one of your sketches, Betty?"

"Very good, sir."

As a cook Betty had had a some imagination, & with the vegetables & fruit we had she managed to produce something that was not so by her artistic merit.

I went across to the studio, an old brick building which had been adapted to the purpose. I think it had once been Huntfield house & looked like it. I had had one well taken out, & a by candle light sketches. It was a ^{rough} sketch, a very rough one, & I could have a fine one made of it. I thought, as Angelo who came down here a week. The deep-faded picture stood in the corner & I stood & looked at it & wondered that somehow the impression had faded in me, ~~the impression~~ ^{the picture} had faded. Ophelia floating in the river, & Ophelia had faded to disappear in the flesh.

referred

I then remembered - Her. - She must have been very much there in ^{my} chamber of our narrow, & she had but to draw back the curtain - Could I point her as I had seen her & tell her who? - Why not? I thought the Soldier of Pindar Station was no Ophelia, but some Brankton or a Valley. And yet - a day ago, rather days she might have passed for that typical creature, a child of the Rossetti period before a cigarette & he-tanned eye had made some more tough & tight.

Well, why should I wait try it. She was very vivid to me, & would remain so, even though she was the creature of a passing dream.

Just as I was leaving the Huntfield gate I saw the remnant of a train disappearing through that other gate, & thought nothing of it. The wet fields & meadows lay before me, & the distance I could see a solitary farmhouse rather like a house in the middle of a field. Poor old John Stage contemplates. Paul loomed, & the Taylor ran a gallop had made of his hay crop. I climbed a field gate & went walking towards him.

He was very much the old world, a look rather like a melancholy goat with the tuft of hair on his chin, & his

Pan - like face. His shoulders drooped, & his pale blue eyes
looked vacant. In the parlour he was leaning looked down at
her. I liked old John Stye, for he was rather like suggested
some gentle old dame with no back left in him & this was the
thing that different summer nature had reflected in him.

"Hello, John."

He gave me a half cynical smile, for was in the thick of
a ruined hay crop I must have been a regular figure to
him.

"I had to run back, Mr. Bygones."

"Hope I've brought you better weather, John."

He gave a slight ^{shake of the shoulder} shrug. His philosophy was that of a single
soul who went regularly to church, & accepted what God gave
him.

"Well, maybe August will be better. I've got those good fields
of wheat & barley. They be lookin' lovely. If I'd had the
time & the money I'd have built a villa."

I looked across the field & saw "The Meadows" standing very
white & refreshed with miniature park. The time I had seen
was just before it, & a bright red sports car was parked by the
paved porch. The house belonged to that period when much
French chateau style was in fashion, with ~~too many~~ ^{the} tower capped
~~with a small tower~~ ^{it was} small work. It did not set down in the
good earth, but forced like some affected spirit at a garden
party. In fact it represented all that was miserable in the
Victorian age, a kind of stilted & capricious fashion. It's very
things forced like wretched gaiters in top hats & frock
coats. I had also thought God that a belt of three
miles out so far as Hatfield was concerned.

"I know a lot of the new people over there, John."

He did not, & did not want to.

I started with him back to the farm, & his face deepened
frown & the sodden fields seemed to deflate by degrees for
nothing. The sun was more welcome, & I turned back with
the idea of getting out of ship & walking a mile or two,
and then the gateway of "The Meadows" provoked me. Why
should it I should have a look round? I did so, &
was close to the house when a man came out of the porch
& opened the door of the red sports car. It was the kind
of car I associated with speed-cars.

He saw me, opened the door, & stood waiting for me.

I will confess that I disliked the fellow from the first glance. He was a large & powerful looking brute, with a quite abnormal resemblance to a ^{certain} notorious cabinet-maker. He had a low forehead with a streak of black hair ^{slanting} across it, a heavy round face with bulging cheeks, an insignificant double chin, ^{blatant blue} ~~staring~~ eyes. So on the single strands of fat around a alcohol, though he must have been very much older than I was. His clothes were melodramatic, a green shirt, a dark blue jacket. " "

He said to me - " Can I be of any help to you. "

But there was trouble even in the country. Was the greedy flamboyant tough the new owner of the "Freedom"? I had received a ^{flamboyant} ~~pleasant~~ neighbor.

" Are you Mr. Howard? "

" I am. "

" I was just looking round. "

I was to discover that Major Harold Howard was no mere homey bully. He had a quick tongue & sense of wit, & when needed he could play the same game. He had been looking me over with those ^{blatant blue} ~~little dark~~ eyes that seemed such a profusion of fat, & they were not friendly eyes.

" Have you run far, sir? "

So he was being facetious. By courtesy was not exactly right - eh? "

" About a hundred yards. - I happen to be a neighbor. "

Then he smiled at me, & I did not like his smile.

" Of course. Mr. Robert Byers - I believe. "

I nodded, & he put out a large hand.

" Honored - I'm home - to have no notable a neighbor. "

I told him I had a gigged it hard, & I was surprised at the grip he gave me in return. About it was like a challenge - a trial of strength between us.

" You'll excuse me, Mr. Byers, but I have to get back to town. I just ran down to see how things were going. We are not open yet. "

He flipped a large hand at me, & opened the door of the red car.

" Good morning, sir. "

He smiled at me & I thought - " You cheeky ^{brander} brute. "

IV

My contact with Horwood had put me in a more contemplative mood; I neither ran nor skulled, but went & wandered about the Hartfield garden. I was helped myself like a dog to some strawberry that was ripe under their protective netting. By the way, Mr Horwood's physical appreciation of my country costume had made me conscious of myself as a creature who could indulge in self-indulgence. Had he ~~summed~~ me up as a sort of Chelsea exhibitionist, a colonial Cree who was not quite male? I well admit that I did not conform to conventional standards in the matter of dress, but if I had a liking for colour in my clothes it was just part of my activity. I could have enjoyed myself among the haunts of the Elizabethan court, for there was colour in that period, dress, in great quantities. If I wore a purple velvet coat & amber coloured trousers in the evening, it did not mean that I was an ^{inferior} low class or a friend of demagogues.

I wandered into the studio & looked at my unfinished picture. The background was there, but the ^{figure} ~~figure~~ ^{remained} ~~was~~ a vague splash. It had baffled me, I suppose there is a prehistoric fascination in watercolor which can ~~transform~~ ^{transform} him into ~~beastly~~ ^{beastly} ~~beastly~~ ^{beastly} at last. In fact I had dabbed a splash of vermilion on the floating figure face & that childish gesture reminded me of a thing Sigbert Gladwyn the novelist had said to me. "One gets stuck sometimes, as I write. 'Red, black, black, black, black' across my manuscript. It seems to have a tonic effect. Or perhaps it is a counter. 'And back to you, my love.' Yes Sigbert Gladwyn could be a respectable ~~and~~ person."

Now I had no portrait in prospect for the moment, for now I accepted half a dozen or so commissions a year, for a successful craftsman is punished as severely as the bookbinder or the stockbroker, & even more so because his craft lays on the cunning of an individual hand. I had saved money, & that - according to the Political Hour - was another crime against the community. I had even been asked by my Inspector of Taxes to explain the full meaning of my income, & I had

by looking for at
in more solemn self.

answered in one word - "Yes." I did most of my portraiture in the winter during my final Malvern studio in Chelsea, for Sir Mortimer no doubt the English winter that he fled to South Africa or Bermuda. So, at that time I gave myself to imagery & romantic stuff, & painted for my own personal pleasure, & I was quite prepared to choose the taro-mayo by giving my work away after exhibiting it - if I chose to do so.

I do remember of the face of the floating Ophelia was a challenge & a provocation. I could hear Sir but always say to me - "You have gone far - you are a girl, & that young & a pretty face which went a land water." Why was it that the paper went out of our craft & left you feeling bored & shabby? But now, as I stand there, I remind that I had a face for my Ophelia, if - I could reproduce it from memory.

So provoked was I that I got out a sketchy pencil & sat down with the thy on my knee, & tried saying it in a profile, but somehow the result did not please me. She had appeared so vivid to me & now - was in no short a time - her features had become vague. But why? Our interpretation of a particular subject may - another - be baffling & entirely incomplete. It is though some element was missing in our self, the subtle inward meaning of the soul behind the face. Was it that I had not grasped the more systematic significance of her? Perhaps? After I had found myself baffled by some subject that had appeared obvious to my eyes, but chosen when I had to express it in canvas.

I was frowning at the study I had made, when Bill appeared at the studio door.

"Dinner, sir."

"Hallo, Bill. Did the bell ring?"

"Yes, sir."

I had not heard it.

Dinner over I lit a pipe & strolled out into the garden. An old red brick garden-house was tucked away at the end of the terrace, overlooking the river. It was a very special haunt of mine for reading & contemplation, & I lay down in a lay chair, & sat my particular tree forced against the wing

by a great clump of chadocelubus. Some of them were still in flower, myrtle, cherry, white, glowing like lamps in the slanting sunlight. And then I saw that Susan was sitting in the sun-draw.

~~Smaller Dolly~~
~~The gods, what a day of coincidence!~~

Now, even after a day of such coincidence - the old tag did apply. I could hardly believe my eyes. - She was sitting there with the sunlight streaming upon her a light of her glorious hair. She was wearing the same dress, but it seemed to have a tinge of amber in the evening light. She sat quite still, almost still as though she had been caught by the hand of fate, a statue - I had walked into the picture, a living picture - a quite supernatural figure in a perfect picture. He was less than forty yards from each other, with the river between us.

I was still in doubt, right a fallow, a great ahead impulse was to go in & say a word to her. Had she recognized me? I said an arm in a Roman salute, a salute which was what I should have expected it to be from the way she had chided me at Birchfield. She rose to her feet, walked out of the sun-draw, & up the grassy slope, & I was supposed to watch her disappearing back. She crossed the gravelled space & disappeared into the white pillared porch, & I was left with the landscape.

Now, I will confess that I was not a little pained.

What the devil was she doing there?

And with that small & bright cad?

Was she the Country Club's first guest?

But Howard had said that the place was not yet open to visitors.

Was she his wife, - or - nearly more - dubious?

I turned & walked back along the river. No, I was not pained, not at all pained. By the Merlin had pointed me to a situation that was more important, more provocative than the mere privacy of a picture. What I was seeing that smaller Dolly right in the face of Susan of that most poignant & picturesque old story.

(After Page 20.)

Dread the man!

I was enjoying a few winter solitudes in the garden when he appeared on the other side of the river in shorts & a bright blue vest. Rather ridiculous! He stood there, posing, & then gave me a kind of Hitler salute.

A Hitler salute - of all things! - If you were for good cause to hate that hysterical brute I have.

Colossal idiot. - And what is the idea of a man of fast living about like an Olympic hero? - He must be clear in fact, one of those silly persons who he wants to prove to half a dozen much that he can be ~~permeated~~ ^{permeated} you a lousy.

I was forced. - I just got up & made a casual return to the house.

If Mr. De Beyer much scribbles - I think I can do it. And hysteria? He was the old fool who carried that word & pinned it on women like a brooch.

So not modern one in the man about as hysterical as an intricately baboon. What of his matched pointer, & his mob oratory, & his nose & his belly? - I can remember that Page's book in poor Vienna. Stupid, screaming fear.

Was hysterical? My God!

Man, man also claim the right to a kind of royal solitude when his right brain proposes to do a bit of thinking.

Salute, to be alone with yourself just for five minutes when he can be the gabble for the B.B.C.

V

I suppose my vanity - such as it was - had required a creditable
 character, & yet I was not a particularly ^{creature} vain heart. I do true
 craftsmen in metal, for - there is in his making of a stick of that
 chronic habit which is ^{spiced} seasoned with humor. Mr. Sigi had
 been pretty kind to me. What is more I had consulted with one
 who could do other things supremely well, & far better than I
 could. Jimmy Slayton might box with me, but had I
 faced the real Jim Slayton in a fight - it would have been
 Slayton. Also, Angelo with a foil was much more than a
 match for me. Even in my Healy days I had never got
 beyond the semi-fail of the Diamond Scabb. Ah yes, there had
 been a man who was just a bit better than I was.

Yes, more than one male vanity was involved in the adventure.
 Had I ^{misread} been completely, & could she choose to consult with
 a fellow like Hornwood & turn her back upon Mr. Robert
 Barker? As I have hinted I had had my affair with
 women, & though they had taught me much, they had failed
 to flower into faith. - Barker - like a boy - I had
 always believed that some day I should meet the unique
 creature whose power to hold me would be utter.

I will confess that I prompted Bill to find out what
 he could about "The Meadows", without - of course -
 any reference to Selda Mallory. He did obtain some
 information from gossip at "The Green Man", where a
 fellow who was working in The Meadows garden dropped
 it right. She recalls I gave to Bill was that I
 should not molest my neighbors. All that he could
 find out was that ^{most of} the staff were in residence, a Polish
 chef, two Italian waiters & two chambermaids - one of
 whom was Hungarian. There was no reference to Selda
 Mallory. It was said that The Club was to be
 partly residential, & would open the following week.

It seemed a very mixed bag to me, with a Soho
 flavor, & I was ~~not~~ puzzled by the fact she was
 to play there. Could she be that earth mother? I
 recalled the very suggestion with a heat that rather
 astonished me. Well, what was she going to be, house-keeper,
 dance partner, a creature of allures. But her entrance to
 me, & her remote dignity seemed to negate any such

hired glaucom. to me

The river was fine, & I took my ship out, & recounted the
 home from the river, & all that I saw was a large green
 was clearing what appeared to be center of bridge, supplies for
 the Club Bar. Two fellows in what seemed to be helping the
 van was in with the crew. Both of them were smoking cigarettes,
 & chatting to each other in a language I took to be Italian.
 I saw no sign of her, nor did Woodward see her when
 up while I was at the river.

Then, I had a piece of luck. ^{my} Slighter arrived in his
 Sagrada, & found me sleeping in the studio. I had been
 doing some shadow-boxing, & I did not see him for the
 moment. I was standing at that infamously picture.

"Hallo, sir. How goes it?"

I was never more glad of a visitor, ^{of} my Slighter
 in particular. Slightly was he might be, with that bigged,
 flattened face, but I felt that he was about the sweetest tempered
 creature I had ~~met~~ ^{known} ever. When he fought, it was with
 a smile, or an ironic grin, which could be depressing to
 an opponent's courage, especially so of the other fellow had
 lost his temper. He looked at me & he looked at the
 infamously picture, & his big, swarthy, bony face turned me.
 Then I remembered that he had seen that picture before, &
 that the face was still on any more blow. ^{my} Heavy-
 weight though he was - could be as sharp as a ^{my} dachshund
 small-boy.

I gazed at him.

"Your face still missing, Sam?"

"That's not usual with you, sir."

"Lost how?"

"By a small find the lack."

So reached his face. I had an affection for Jimmy.

"You are staying to lunch. We can change. - Betty also
 purchased something for you. Stay or go's it?"

He shook his head at me.

"I'm in training again. Been with punch, sir. - I see you've
 got some new kind of neighbor. - I had a dog's match with
 some fellow who, blow in there."

"Red sports car."

"Yes. I tried to play punch with one coming from the
 village. I said I did it down."

I had a sudden idea. Jimmy Slighter got about a good
 deal, & was familiar with the life of London. So he was

Mr Howard had had a buggy catch, & the big Saylor had wiped the red ear eye.

"Singer?"

"Go on?"

"Set down, ma. You met a fellow named Howard?"

"Howard? Calls himself a Doctor. Name of Harold."

"I'm not sure about the Harold. Good Danish name, but not to my fancy. All the Harolds I have met -"
Singer had squatted on a chair, with his arm crossed on the back of it. He was frowning, & when I saw Saylor frown closely, each about town took notice.

"Big, big time beat. The fellow in the red car was Howard."

"Got it. - I thought his fog was familiar. For, I once barked it."

It was becoming more than interesting, & I sat down on a stool opposite Singer.

"Ever heard of 'The Ace of Hearts', ma'?"

"Vague."

"Singer right club in town. Howard ran it. - And know he it that he got into trouble & had to close."

"And how did you fall out with him?"

"Oh, one of his Sigors checked me, & I just gave him one. I saw Howard bleed in."

"Poor innocent home. - Well, that is my own neighbor."

Singer felt for a pipe & pouch. He half filled the pipe & lit it. When he threw the rest his tobacco to his front, but this appeared to be a pipe occasion.

Not a nice neighbor, ~~is~~ I think I got the idea. So he became got a bit too hot for Howard. What about a nice quiet place in the country where the police might not be interested? I wish a relaxing adalting & a bit of gambling for the mob with money to burn. All the yellow girls & the fat old stallions. Right he made to look so nice & respectable.

I will admit that I was shocked. We are not usually special people in these Far Low Amber days, but there are certain activities that can ^{practise} ~~practise~~ ^{practise} ~~practise~~ in the healthy town. Fartitioning may be a somewhat rare venture, but the wheel of Singer Saylor's Yellow Girls & fat old stallions was utterly worthless to me. And what was she doing in this mangle? Did she know -? Would Singer have claimed

her away the yellow girl? Scully ^{in me} revolted at the
idea. He, damn it, she just could ~~not~~ ^{not} answer.

I too had hit a pipe, for surely to bite upon a second
necessity.

Said - "Sir, I shall join the Hawaiian
Court Club."

He stared hard at me.

"What's the idea?"

"What's the idea?"
"Supervision, my lad. I'm a respectable person - 'three
parts' & I could sagitate - if necessary."

He grinned at me.

" And you don't get into a rough house."

"Would you don't get into a rough house."
"Would Mr Harold Howard meet a rough house? Prather
that not. - Builder -"

He modelled a big gun broadhead.

He nodded, a big grin broadened.
"Harold might get a stack, - You've got a pretty good
right to the chin."

I turned back at him.

" Let's would 'nt shut my car in to me it."

What is our conscience? A ~~kind of~~ ^{sort of} mirror, clean & clear, that is developed by certain disciplines & habits & disciplines. We are patchwork people, & the frailties of the flesh follow us through the years, to become chartered in old age, if old age has discerned how to grow ~~beautiful~~ ^{inwardly serene}. ~~It is not true & not long.~~ You, beauty, that mysterious quality ^{which} ~~that~~ manifests like God only to the chosen few. There can be beauty in negativity, the "I have I shall not" of the old ritual. Ritual, tradition, what the mindless call background. Man should strive to elude a ritual of his own, to be clean in body & soul of heart, worthy of a fighter, faithful in the flesh, & capable of tenderly cowardice & greed. There is no greatness without some creature of spirit, a belief in the essential dignity of life, if life is to be worth living.

Platitudes - perhaps, but dignity is a quality ^{that} is but little
considered in these democratic days. Who asks if the baker
sings or the garage had have dignity? Does the modern
boy show respect? Is the spirit of Shakespeare dead in
us, because the spirit of a copy of the little man will not
tolerate Shakespearean figures? Parable! Some

VI

I had good cause to remember ^{the} that week end when "The Meadow" opened. I gather that Howwood must have made of it an official occasion, & that the whole house was welcoming ^{all} friends. It was no Field of the Cloth of Gold. It might have been a Brooklands race-meeting in the good old days. Cars snorted & swarmed into the place, every sort of car, including a two Seater tour. Loud music, laughter, & the banging of doors, & a giggly hubbub that seemed incessant. It happened to be a fine, still evening, & yellow mussels had been pitched on the lawn, & people were taking the little drink there served by the two dapper waiters. The north window of ^{Hartfield} the ^{St. John} commanded the Meadow gate, & I well admit that I stood there for a while watching the glorious invasion.

As I have said it was a still evening when I came home, & though Hartfield stood back fifty yards from the road, the place seemed to shudder with all that mechanical pattern. I am hypersensitive to noise, & Hartfield had been a country house, invaded by chicadees, & at night its peace was utter. You might hear an owl hoot, or the wind in the willows, or a faint mutter as the moon slipped its way towards the sea & stirred the water-fly & a reed. So peaceful were these nights that I was utterly startled when the hubbub was yards. By a car came me out to my gate, & there I found a big black limousine parked with its roof about touching the old main gate.

It contained a chauffeur who was sprawled in the back seat, & smoking a cigarette, a chauffeur - I presume - to pass the waiting hour in slumber.

I said - "Do you mind removing your car from my gate."

He sat up. He was English, a neat, respectable looking fellow, a typical of the blue coated & powdered butler one sees loafing in the best land.

"What's wrong with it being here? - I'll be up over there."

"You are blocking my gate."

"Want to come out?"

"That's not the question."

"You don't own the car, do you, son?"

"This happens to be part of my property. You know that car."

He gave me an impatient shrug, & looked back again with the cigarette adorning his lower lip. I put my hand to the door handle, & then I saw a flash of hair leaning down at me, P. C. Gator, the local constable. He was a tall, fair, very pleasant looking & he had manner.

"Any trouble, sir?"

"This car is blacked by Gator, & the driver refuses to move it."

"See you" came a voice from within, - "So - what?"

P. C. Gator came a stolid beside me. He had a pleasant, quiet voice, & there was nothing of the bully in him.

"Now then, - move this car."

"What for?" - I'm the right side of the gate, Gator."

"You're a private property, & obstructing the owner."

The man sat up. He spat his words at me. Bloody

"Private property - what? - I have what I want as my private property - the damned county - who -"

P. C. Gator opened the door.

"You are going to move this car, brother, or I shall have to get some a woman you know. - Come on - get going."

Oh, - How well - all right. - It's full up over there."

"You can find a lot of your voice."

"Can I? - Bloody candidate of you."

P. C. Gator was looking pretty green.

"And you can mind your own business too, my lad, if you have any. I suppose you're one of those chaps who are polite when they're pleased to be."

P. C. Gator had said it, but the fellow put on his eye, & still smoking his cigarette, got into the driver's seat & moved the car in to the green way across the way.

"I shah, I am" said I, - for he was I shah to me, "well seem to have collected a nice crowd."

"Not so nice, sir, if you ask me. You could have bought that chap for half a crown."

P. C. Gator continued his patrol, & I - having been somewhat stimulated by the incident, strolled across to the Theatre entrance. I had read somewhere that the British police constable is a peculiar mixture of brashness & respectability, & that he is taught to cultivate manner & civility in his speech.

you the easy purchase of politeness had picked me, & I suspected that during most of the period of my life you the planet the House had done physically to the House. I took it out at once behind the back of your & pieces. Just stark necessity & the bitter human reaction. Yet, surely, in these evolutionary days, the new leader of creation ought shed some of this spite. But necessity still remained for many, those who had not passed in manner formation. Necessity? I stood for a moment between the white gate-pillar. How some stark necessity capably be to play a part in the House of Silence.

I strolled on. Can some parked anywhere, & most of the time of silent vehicle. The house had captured, a Dr. Howards' father had passed in to dinner. I heard an orchestra playing, & I stood to listen. I thought of "Sleeping Beauty" ballet. Now, I am startled about mine, & the particular melody ^{her music for} always ~~imposed~~ me, & at the moment it seemed to express some other exception. It recalled to romantic movement about my picture of Her. How she perhaps - a sleeping beauty, dragged into acquaintance by some necessity that I had not followed?

I strolled on, & found myself opposite the park front window of what was the dining room. The orchestra had finished its waltz, & in place of the music I heard voices, the conversation of people who were already well oiled. I had a sign of men in dinner jackets, & women in evening gowns. There was vulgar but due, & a giggle by politeness. And then I realized that I had been observed by a party at a particular table. I saw in my plain-colored velvet jacket, & under-tones, & suppose I must have been a colorful joke to these revellers. I heard a woman say - "Look at Oscar!" A fat fellow who was wiping a moult with his serviette, turned the focus of his other hand at me. "Waj, waj, - how's Chichester?" I smiled at them & turned away. Did the modern house still speak of the Nighty Primer, & did I suggest the gentleman who could sit up to watch a fish die?

I walked down to the river, & there I discovered something that did not please me, a most lovely stage, & three fourths mooned to it. Was the river to be invaded by Dr. Howards' week end crowd?

But of our dinner was waiting for me, & that the world which was mine yet it was not to be wholly mine & that summer evening. I am early tired so far as being in command, but of sleep was not to be. Arcadia. I do recall of that blameworthy fellow reached me, & when I did close off, I was yanked back to wakefulness by being down, loud chuckles & laughter, the starting up of engine & the fire & from the melted things produced as they departed through the Meadows gate. Even the beam of headlights glared down my window.

I lay & cursed that crowd. I was too wide awake now & feeling more like actor than a laborer. Moreover, I realized that a moon was shining, some a starlight, & not like those damned headlights. I flung out my bed, got into some clothes, made my way down the oak stairs & out onto the garden. It was such a still in the moonlight, in cedar & the black marble & the old house staring with all its windows darkly shivering. Had those fools ever wondered the moon & the Meadows, & the question whether they were playing into darkness? Perhaps some of them had seen two moons!

Sooner I wanted action, & the more was for me. I passed out by the main gates & across the road, & though that other gate, ^{the main gate} this white horse looked like a real prehistoric piece of iron cast in the moonlight, & the yellow shingles great fangs. Some windows were still alive, & two of them on the ground floor. I crawled the ground & the drive, & the crepe solid where I was wearing made no sound in the gravel. I slid along the wall to the lighted window. My nose open.

I found myself looking into the Meadows Club Bar, & at two figures, one slumped on a high stool, the other standing behind the bar counter. So that was her job bar, & then a bar-lady. She was in an amber colored frock, & the light played upon her hair, & to me her face had a hint of tired darkness.

The man was Howard. When he spoke to her I recognized his voice.

"Well, not a bad first night, my sweet. - I think I'll have a last one."

I shall never forget the way she looked at him. She smiled absolutely still.

"He appeared - claud, - Mr Howard. Past midnight."
He ~~appeared~~ to wriggle his backside on the stool.

"Have a seat, darling. - You are - sure. No sugar about. - Bunch -"
She answered him with curving eyebrows.

"You can help yourself. I have finished for tonight."

"Oh, come along. - I'm a bit ^{well} tired, I know. - But why should you & I finish - except in -"

He never said what he might have been meaning to say, for she saw me, & I had meant to see me, & softer than what her mind reacted was, - but I had a feeling that I had saved her from - well - what? I sat that I quite refused till afterwards that of showing myself at the window was to give both of us a chance to betray ^{the influence} the ~~importance~~ of the occasion. It was the chance & the choice, & the choice was intact.

"I am in danger out there."

Howard's large & grey black head went up. I told her I saw her on my way, but she was not looking at him, but at me.

Howard swung round on his stool, & as he did so I saw one of his back move a little, & my eye caught. I note-stopped & waited. Howard came forward to the window. I heard his voice, tried a memory.

"Who's there?"

I stepped back into the light. He was leaning out, & his large face was flushed & grey. But I saw more than that. She had gone. She had taken the chance of attention had given her.

"Good even, Mr Howard. - Having a very night?"

He glared at me.

"Mr. Byers - I think."

"Quite so. - You were so sure, that I found her afterwards. - And I took a stroll."

I could divine his eyes, but he chose to dismiss it. Maybe he thought discretion advisable.

"You are not a club member, are you?"

"In I think."

"Well, we do not happen to admit ^{non-members}. - Certain regulations, you know."

I smiled at the empty room behind him. He had got to discover that he was no longer there.

"I shall have to remind you, Mr Howard. - I should say and like to join your club. - I get rather bored

(After Page 32.)

So this is our infamous County Club!

I am pretty tough, but I don't like the water, in the water, on the path, particularly some of the path. The whole crowd might have been expected from the most number of Saff. Night Club. I have seen one or two in my time, & I know.

Not all Tarnish, but greasy Tarnish.

Some of the path are not too bad, sort of eyes another who think they are seeing life.

But some of the oldish water, silly old water - a pretty water! The Paul Ryan Racheide Brigade. Yes, I am very vulgar; it is rather good to be wholehearted vulgar. And how these fools drink. They drink on which day on the first night, & then found to find a Brady.

I have been standing for hours, trying to look bright. But aching. Yes, & some heart-ache. If I happened to be an egg much I should not have to sell drink & all that. How many times over I asked to have one? And I did it. Collected quite a packet of plaster.

One has to hold on to something; I have nothing. I make myself up a child's face when I see a clean man over all these silly, boozing fellows. It helps.

And I am not so pleased with Mr Harold Hammond. Too much liquor. Too much the bold buccann. Did he think when he hired me I should be easy.

To me the worst sort of shame when the man who answers that you got inside your' to bed with him.

Maybe he was just too ragged.

And what was Mr Robert Bryan doing moping about in those colorful clothes? Rather a mysterious person. But he did me a good turn in detaching the American Ball, & giving me a chance to get out of the arena.

I looked up close.

Heaven, how good bed was! No silly face, & no aching feet.

sanctuary - well too much - country."

I could feel his approving nod as the suggestion. But he
it did not please him. And then he decided to be positive
- sanctuary.

"I am sure it ^{will} be an answer, sir."

"Thank you. - Er - goodbye, Mr. Howard."

And I left him to discover the capture behind him.

VII

This high summer was passing as distantly as the political situation, but Don Howwood's first week end happened to be a fine one. The Sunday began for me with a letter which Bill brought me while I was rowing.

"Found this in the letter-box, sir."

I finished rowing before I opened the letter. It was from Howwood. He regretted to have to tell me that to become a Club member it was necessary for me to be proposed & seconded by two other members. Right it did he. There was no wisdom of his wishing to help in the matter.

Well, that situation could be replaced. The "Paradise" called itself an hotel as well as a Country Club, & if I demanded a meal without alcohol I gathered that Howwood would have to serve me. I was all for attack after the most significant scene of the previous night. That night of each night I had a comely drinking party at a club or two, to secure a room both behind the bar & in bed. I had also felt more than contempt for the much-cryspater who thought pressure to be a man any desirable woman who had a career or a job which depended upon his pleasing him & I could gauge the bitterness of any further woman who found herself engaged to that sort of blackguardism. Physical abuse might be a cause to her, & I should imagine had that abuse.

Why had she taken a job of the description? Just "Ginn's necessity"? And perhaps she had not known her Howwood? Was I then a rational fool about her? What did I know of her past or her present? Had she been out for some profitable adventure she had shown no desire to excitement at my expense. No, dammit, I could not remember her as a debauched beauty whom a genius would have persuaded to accept tameness.

After breakfast & a pipe I went down to the boat-house & got out my stuff. It was a rowing day & I started really up stream past the Meadows. Obviously one or two people were sitting in deck chairs at the house & I appeared to arouse their interest. Probably a fellow in light blue was out & about who was really of an expert or a sculler must have been expected on such quiet water. The sight of

Good ownership has always ^{delighted} me, it's about my own a
 cleaner, ^{a steady} I was to chuckle in the Olympic year
 over the same results of British efforts. The old British
 competitors to claim first were Smith & Suggs a few years of
 the old School I see. So, I will admit I rowed out a put
 on speed past The Meadows, a good boat & the rich
 over the still water. A black girl & a white girl
 stood up to watch me, a such watch as I had ever
 known of good watermanship.

I rowed up stream for a mile without an easy, & then
 lay on my back & looked at the landscape. I was very fit &
 I should not need a breath, but the shining fields &
 woods & the liquid water persuaded me to rest a stone.
 Have you ever sat contemplating the surface of a river,
 & discerned as you watched it all sorts of complex patterns,
 of changing light & shadow, the weaving & weaving of water-weeds,
 the sudden transformation of reed-bed glaze into muffled silver
 when a breeze came along, or reaction for no apparent reason
 at all? A river moods are many, it may be dull & grey,
 or playful & smiling, or put a mirror to you, & on this
 summer morning it had a stage stillness. It did not seem
 to flow, but by reflecting the sky & the clouds & the
 shadow of the trees. What it might have resembled the
 streambed of a fellow & a boat who was fairly rather
 pleased with the way the blades of his oars took the
 water.

I turned the boat, & paddled more slowly homeward.
 Maybe the river had persuaded me to be more cautious
 of rowing than the idea of my muscles. The artist in me
 dominated the athlete. And then I heard a sudden hail
 behind me.

"Look out, sir, - put ahead."

I rowed, backed water, a touch of a head. A boat
 was close to me in mid-stream, and the Meadows ^{front}.
 I found myself looking at a rufous black & light
 blue jacket & cream-colored trousers. A little fat fellow
 was sitting poised with a put-pole.

"Sorry," said I - "my fault."

The blade sailed again. Perhaps she thought me more a
 figure of a man than her paunchy partner.

I called my ship round then.

"Sorry," said he, "said the fat fellow."

"Steady," said I, & I pulled on, the blade turned
 round & watched me.

Her interest gave me an idea. I stopped sailing, & proceeded to pack the stuff towards them. The fat little fellow was not much good with a gun-pole, & I soon overhauled them.

I send - Please excuse me, but am you member of the "Freedom Club?"

The little man nodded. It was pretty obvious that he did not want me to stay in, but the bland "welcome".

"We are
I'm thinking of going, but I am told that I have to be watched
for by two members."

for 2 ^{two} members.
The blade came ^{was} one an arch look.

"I happen to live just down the river. My name's Ryan."

"Well, - really, - the - Mr. Bryan. - Off course, someone told me of your lovely old home."

She was a Nancy creature, a very much easier better.

" We'd feel honored, would it be, please?"

George was for the ruling, & I suspected that, my name
caused nothing to him. ~~My name was the reason~~

"Well, of course. - I'm afraid, so; I'm rather - jumpy about

"George" said the lady - "don't adapt you a mouse
idea about your me -" say - or the birds are poor to see
further. And the only they be reach in the Forest Prison."

George gave her a half look. He was a poor little
fellow.

"I'm not so ignorant as you think, my dear. - I have heard of the Bazaar."

See fig 2.

"So what! Of course we shall be delighted."

I modeled a rant at her, & she tossed her blonde curls at me.

"Take you, madam."

"Our Home is Heavenly."

" I thank you, Anne is healthy."

" Sir, Mr. Byran, to my friends."

Her husband became acquainted with the pole, it was obvious
that the article had lasted long enough. I dipped my hands
a new way - well, her son of course from the Howard.
And over the body inevitable to health. So she certainly re-
ceive for the region.

I made up my mind to trouble Dr Harold H. Howard
that very morning, & I stayed up a quite decent
long night. I supposed that the "Meadow" club-bar
would be open by twelve o'clock, & that it was more than

probable that I should find the Heatleys there. A few
words and guests were sitting out on the lawn, ready or coming,
but they did not pay much attention to me. I strolled into
the house, & in the large hall I found a waiter polishing
tables.

" Is the Holland in

"Is Don Howard in?"
He was a neat, yellow look'g fellow with ched up & a
flattened nose. He got seemed some against the of gentian.
"Maybe." I had had some experience in dealing

1. Prayer.

flattered me, & he got me to
"Maybe."
He did not see me, & I had had some expression in dealing
with such subjects. If we either could then be heard then at
outings: and I well saw. I asked you in question."

"I am glad to see you. I asked you a question."

"So - what?"

"You will take the trouble to show that quarter paper."
He gave him a flick.

He gave her a flick.

"In the office".

" I say the office."

" I don't love - true.

"That door - there. He picked a thumb at a particular door. It was half open, & I walked towards it & pushed it back & saw the Sullivan I was in search of. About, he might have been expecting me & had prepared both the table & the conversation piece. A ^{pleasant} ~~pleasant~~ face. He was smoking a cigar, & lay back in a chair with his feet on his desk, & the blattest blue eyes gazed on me.

" Good morn, Mr Bryant. You had my letter.

"Die."

"I did."

"Do you mind my saying that I don't tolerate violence to my employees?"

"It doesn't but I took another

My employer.
He did not ask me to sit down, but I took another
chair & straddled it. This was the kind of welcome I
had expected.

"I had people as I find them, Mr. Howard." - I
stared hard at his feet. He was wearing brown suede
shoes, - lavender bloused socks, & they were cocked at
me, with studded canopies. His eyes smoldered towards
me. He was the kind of fellow who looked even more
grossly arrogant with his natural lips smucked at that brown
appetizer.

Well, Mr. Byers, you had my letter."

Well, Mr. Ryan, you had my letter.
I looked ^{around} at the sunny streak of black hair that

slated across his forehead. Apparently he was the King of
Cedar about Town.

"Have you an application form for membership?"

"I don't think you can have read my letter, Don Ryan."

"I don't, a judge more than you intended to carry in it."

"You need nothing for - also, may I say that I don't welcome
members who are threatened to my employer?"

I smiled at him.

"Is it a quality you do not cultivate?" I should not have said
no, & you I stand at his feet.

He blew smoke in my direction.

"I will answer you & you over words, Don Ryan. I treat
people as I find them."

"That's a little - a fact."

"So certain people, you."

"I would like that application form, if here, if you have such
a thing."

He swung his feet off the desk, & sat up.

"And who, Don Ryan, is going to sponsor you?"

"I think that is my business."

He looked hard at me.

"One moment, sir. My Secretary does not manage tough
members, or those who - admit to get over-estimated. It is a
mistake to have to throw such people out."

He looked at me heavily & shouldered, I smiled at him.

"And who is your choice out, Don Harwood?"

"I am - in a matter of fact."

I looked at him. He had a powerful heart, but just a
flabby.

"I see. - Well, I am still with you for that form."

And suddenly he leaned forward, pulled a sheet of paper
out of a tray, & turned it to me.

"You can fill it in, Don Ryan, & leave it with me."

I looked at him at a loss.

"I am not, when I have obtained my signature."

I got up, smiled at him, & left the room, looking rather like
a bullock & my bull behind a gate.

The flat faced waiter was still poking his table, or pretending
to do so, & I was pretty sure that he had been
listening to the conversation. I had seen him & a brown
pocket, & more out of mischief spirit than for any feeling
of good-will I spared him that or no.

"Where abouts in the bar?"

The vacuette went up with a bang, & he became obnoxious.
~~to his~~

"I had you, in; the way you."

The door of the Club Bar was open, & I could see people sitting at high-tops & round black-topped tables. It was a flashy, garish sort of room whose Vietnamese had put a purple & beige tawer. The ceiling of the bar & the counter were a brilliant yellow, & the ceiling & walls a smart blue. Bad tint. - Not for engineers. I saw Solda Mullay behind the bar, dressed in black, & in the act of pouring juice into two glasses. As a matter of fact they were the Wheatley glasses, & my sponsor was on the spot.

I walked into the bar. For the moment Snodden did not see me; she was adding cream to the gin, but my blonde lady saw & welcomed me, & turned on her stool.

"Come in," Mr. Byam. Here we are all merry & gay at.

Did she had space for a second? Anyhow she
managed to overflow an glass, & had to wipe it
bottom.

" Sorry, sir."

" All the more for me, my dear.

She did not look at me, but I got the impression that to her I was very much there present.

to her I was very much distressed.
I have happened to be a vacant stool next to Mrs
K. Keating & she flattered it.

"Do you see a fork, Mr. Byram. - And you have the membership form. Splendid."

I found myself between him & a chair you can well
a can colored cavalry mounted. I'm & heavily bobbed at
me behind his wife. o"

What will you have, Sir?

Oh, a good ^{one} line, a thick my neck.

I placed the piece of paper on the counter & watched Mr. Mallory without making it obvious.

" Give a line for Mr Byers, my dear

Did he say I was all a Sunday?

Sasha took a glass jar & whiff & held ^{it} under a gas bottle that was ^{supposed} to be down by one of those metal holders where a trial is held for a long time. Her

"moments appeared easy & deliberate, but my opinion was that she was making them so. She might have been a perfect mechanic sewing her world with efficiency, but utterly without emotion. Her very dignity was defensive, & I could understand that defence was needed.

She set the glass down before me, but she never did not lift to my face. I said "Thank you," ~~Miss Pennington~~, & she turned away towards the chairs, you may have seen, He was holding up a finger.

"A repeat for me, Sorry - darling."

Sorry - darling - indeed! I gave her a kind of glass, but he really little people remind just people to me.

I had to remember my appearance, I particularly so the lady. She was not forthcoming, I had to make the best of it.

"Oh! Mr. Byron - I did so love your portrait of Lady Mainwaring in the Academy."

I raised my glass to her.

"Thank you. I am subject to my."

"Oh - how?"

"As in the matter is so formidable."

She glared at me. Good, was she going to suggest that I should paint her portrait?

"Should I be - easy?"

"Definitely."

She picked up the marble top of her fan.

"You haven't signed it yet?"

"Oh again I haven't a fan."

"Except your fan."

He produced one, & I signed my name, & Mr. Bentley & George added their.

"Then - Mr. Byron."

"I am very grateful to you both."

I raised my glass again to the both. Proctor had moved to the other end of the bar, & was talking to an old fellow with a full Benjamin Disraeli. She was sitting a well-known people to me. He shivered down on him, with a shining galaxy of false teeth. God, what was she doing here? Had my first impression been right & sustained, the fools of a lovely surface. She stood straight & still, looking

put Mr. Byam at the meadow while he talked to his
 chatter. He binged. He gave me the impression of mad mirth, &
 he wore a diamond ring.

But I had the decency to prostitute, & I ripped
 my drink & made conversation. It was pretty obvious to me
 that the lady was playing for an invitation to Hatfield, &
 I could ^{suspect} that George was not a gentleman who
 possessed much glamour.

"And are you faintly a picture now, Mr. Byam?"

"Well, yes, a living hell with it."

"Now isn't that exactly a saying?"

I laughed.

"It can be damned unapologetically?"

"You know. I am a very sympathetic person, aren't I,
 George?"

He smiled, & I thought it time to leave at my word.
 "Sandy dinner, - I shall get into trouble if
 I am late. Cooks can't be offended."

I got off my stool.

"I shall see you all your broken. Tell me time."

I sold a small thing on the top of Sarah's
 balding head. I had no place from the bar, & I walked out
 of the bar, & across the lane to Howard's office. He
 was sitting there, such a big man.

I laid the man's hand on the table, took out of
 wallet a crumpled & faded note, & signed for a drink?

"S' a afraid I've no silver."

Howard glared at the piece of paper, & the ground
 at me.

"Now mind the bot, Bob."

I felt a great desire to smash his large & looming
 face.

After page 40.

I found myself wondering tonight whether I have any vanity left in me. I have - of a sort, a sort of justification or a kind of petulant pride? Do I care a damn what a man thinks of me? Do I care of what I think of myself? Much more so. My mum is for me - not for man. Please for Peter. I can feel a misdeed, something that when I remember do say - "But another lady?"

Am I? Not, is a vague sort of way I am reading that no woman is lucky when she feels lucky inside.

I hope, how much can believe & feel like that. Just as if that willow. Leaf can be, easily sold. And I'm not cold, or an ice maker. Maybe I have had my brain, & really a man went into the refrigerator - afterwards, & still there.

When some can look at you you feel terrified. And I'm afraid H.H. is one of them.

Personal fellow - Don Robert Byram

So - he has joined the Club, & passed by the Whiteley woman.

Is she the one?

Surely I don't think so. Benedict - who would want to compete with "George?" On side an one that had been misled by "George."

I suppose, for he has been wrong.

I am a little puzzled of Robert Byram. He doesn't look at you as though you were a basket of peaches to be bought - all a piece. He has manner, & dignity, and - a sense of humor. Also, he looks fit & strong, & not like most of these flabby fools.

Yes, I wonder why he joined the Club. He does not belong here. The Whiteley woman has been gabbling to me about his marvellous old home.

"Said something, my dear!"

Atmosphere. And how did he get in there? Somehow I suspect he of his making a few Georgian boxes.

VIII

Monday brought more rain, steady willow rain that which
can be so much a part of the green island, & yet not always
seen from Heaven. I could picture poor John Sturge looking
at the drowned hay crop, & ^{the} looking pale at the windows of
the Meadows, faced that waited for the bar to open. I
had an early outing on the river, & the water was but thin &
dead, the willow wet & red. I saw Hardy weather. By wet
wet was which to me when I dived the boat, & went
into change.

is to change.
What about some work? I did not feel in the mood
for it, but our creative moods can be incalculable, & now
I have been waiting for you like an infantile creation. I hit
a gift & stumbled across to the studio, & was captivated
by that baffling & inspired picture. I recalled in a
stool & stood at it, with wonder of a free-marched
me. Was my inability to complete the other symptomatic of
something else? Was I gazing for some inspiration that
would not take shape because the material was emotional
images within me ~~were unacceptable?~~
~~and impossible~~

Then, I was stung by a challenge, ^{infinite} as large ^{as} that I could not analyze. Surely I need to dare me to paint Her, not in a dreamy ^{pink} float in green-black water, but as she had stood in stark reality behind that platinum plated bar.

I said: "Yes."
 More than one novelist has told me that you cannot
 write as you please. On a paper on that, & the writer
 sitting at his desk, but some mysterious entity seems to
 take charge, & that which manifests may be utterly suggested
 by the author. I remember Marshall S. telling me that
 he had begun a book in which a particular old lady had
 appeared in a minor character, but as the tale progressed
 she grew into taking charge & became the leading
 body in it. - Such was my mood that morning. I
 removed Ophelia from the ~~cast~~ ^{cast}, & put a clean canvas in
 her place, & got my gun ready, & prepared to be the
 clean-headed & impartial craftsman. I supposed that when

would manifest as a early gay man: black, but not a bit of it. I am a quiet worker with the mood in a man, & the thing grew away from my hand, and it began to attract me, for no other self appeared to be interpreting her in a strange or vivid way. It was Salsda Mallory, I got out Salsda Mallory and my answer self might have been her. Her face had a curious, bigged ahead as though she wanted, a secret self was manifesting though me & to me. I was fascinated & absorbed.

I was conscious of time or of physical things. I did not hear Bill open the studio door.

"Excuse me, now it's one o'clock."

After lunch I returned to the studio, hit a pipe, a rat down on the sofa to contemplate my work. A portrait of a woman? it might not have satisfied me, but as I contemplated it I realized that it was more than an attempt to put a pretty woman on canvas. It might be in the flesh, but it had a quality that was not of the flesh. I remember a woman had always figured me, a part of my art had been to express it, but this was more than temperament. I saw other Salsda Mallory might have posed for me, still head of a dog, but rather a mysteriously brilliant & more mature, Dean Master or Mistress & not the wild eyed maid of the woods. You, as tough gay woman, behind a bar drinking drinks, being bright to the lustful male, but a creature whose name would & secret spiritual glow illuminate.

I sat & stared at her as I had painted her. I had used the word illuminated, & it seemed to me that illumination in the shape of sensitive insight might have come to me. So had the Stokham conceived & presented the Madonna, & my memory went back to Rome & Florence, the Mother of God & the Mother of Man.

I took my pipe out. I was in one of those curious, & winning moods which descend upon those who seek to interpret life. In the olden parlour I was free. Yet, there was a part of me that was modernist & sardonic. Did I really believe in a spirit world? Was I fool enough to translate a night club bawler into a creature from Dante? Sentimental idiot! But it was the shallow modernist, know-all self that was in me which was released. Like a child I could find excitement

chance with some reasonable question.

"Why are the stars there?"

I went up five or six children in the presence of society that was more than an illusion. I could hardly find myself to me in the shape of a young Macdonald. - By the way, were the stars there? Answer me that I am such a foolish man!

I finished in a backward way with the St. John's man, a cattle on a high peaked hill, then blue chitons, for instance. It pleased me, & I had not noticed that the rain had ceased, & a wet sun was shining. ^{by Macdonald} I then look down at a young child lying in the lap, & his face had infinite tenderness.

Then the door opened & I saw Betty.

"A lady has called, sir."

I nearly dropped my book.

"What name?"

"She did it give a name, sir. She said you would know her. She is from the Macdonalds."

"Lain or Leah, Betty?"

She chattered up the little name at once. - Betty was one of my dearest.

"A blonde, sir. She is in the parlour."

"I'll come along."

I waited until Betty had gone. Who was I to see? Her? I saw a white cloth over the picture.

Dear to Betty! I found her posed in a high backed Jacobean chair, & really a old one which she had collected for another. She was in her blue tunic & ermine enclosed coat, & her blue eyes played at innocence. She might have been the mother of a modern flapper. Damn it, I had imagined her back in town with flange.

"Oh, - Mrs. Byers, - do forgive me. I felt I must come & see your wonderful old home."

I could have replied: - "Say you."

I offered her a cigarette, & she picked it up with a certain twisted pleasure, & her eyes were cool. I could not help smiling at myself & at her. I had dreamed of St. Cecilia, & now conversed with a Belgianian Gino.

I made bright conversation. I gave her some of Hawthorne's history, & she sat with her blue lips crossed & placed the fascinated & fascinated flapper. And how was I to

get rid of the lady, & would she go back a point that she had
 quite - checked me - & that wasn't my Maxwell. I was very
 George - was not here to reduce the situation to bored better.
 Then, with an air of some enthusiastic innocent as by Webster
 for his autograph, she said that she would really love to
 see where I worked.

I had had some experience of such situations, one or two of
 them distinctly embarrassing, & I thought that if I got her
 out of the house & showed her the studio she would
 have no further excuse for lingering. She was very kind
 of a sort, & she, the big tomato coloured like her fingers,
 & we should have to cross the wet grass. I told her so,
 & she replied that she really loved puddles. So, off
 we went to the studio.

She threw a glance at the doorway.

"Now isn't it wonderful, my boy, when you paint these
 Maxwell pictures?"

And then, before I had time to say what might happen,
 she had spotted the ^{eyebrows} in the easel covered with a
 cloth.

She said - "Oh, your latest. - I just met Dave
 a pup at it."

Before I could think of an answer she had pushed
 over to the easel & lifted the cloth. In fact, it
 came away in her hand. She stood staring, & I got
 the impression that she was not pleased.

"Well - it's just like
 your Maxwell!"

"I was damn' her."

"Well, - a stick - of a type - from money."

"He's at the rate for you?"

"She has not."

I suspected that she did not believe me.

But her enthusiasm was far too flooded, & the mission flapper
 became the soured blander. The Henderson of such creature is
 less than childish. Had she expected to find a study of
 Sam's healthy side that white cover? Perhaps. The variety of
 some woman in a cinema. Meanwhile I was realising that
 she would go back to "The Meadows" & begin blabbing about
 the business. She might play at cards with S. & L., &
 with suggestive giggles & a mischievous, & a ring with

feminine pulse machine. And if with diplomatic politeness I suggested that she too might be an interesting writer, she would fall back & plant two death sticks of one. She might describe me as a woman, a juvenile play-boy who had to be treated with caution. Surely, Mr Harold Howard might hear of it, & I had my own ideas about Howard.

So I hid to him I said that I was expecting an important telephone call, & would be much if I went back to the boat & waited for it. She gave me a glassy-eyed look. Maybe she had heard that one before.

"I'm sure I must - suppose - with you call, Mr Byron."

I accompanied her to the village gate & watched her blue legs carry her back to The Meadows.

She was standing at my window & got me out of bed half an hour earlier than usual. It was dark & cold, & though the morning had a brilliant sun, I was full neither. I put on my dressing gown & went down & out to the boat house, & saw the ship ^{close}. I realised that the whole needed greasing, but I did not bother, but shipped the rollers into the sun, & parked out. There was something in me that asked for fierce action, & my savings were justly & the right of the battle. The whole next approached at me as though expressing my vague sense of frustration.

Suddenly I heard a voice.

"Look a'head, please."

I made the boat move & glanced over my shoulder. A point by the garden way, & it was Mrs The Meadows. She was sitting on a chair, the paddle resting on the ground. But this was one peaceful hour in the day, & had I needed it? I turned the ship so that I faced her, & lay a my wheel.

"Sorry. I'm afraid I took the rain for granted."

"Then do -"

That fixed me, & the way she looked past me at the water & the willow.

"In all cases & all occasions? - I might explain that until your place started burning - there was peace here."

Her retort was instant.

"It is not my place."

Now, I had seen the sign of a succession of doubts, &

& I felt like counting them, but when I remembered the way she had manifested an answer I let the protest pass.

"I did not think it was, Miss Mallory. That was a sign of the future."

She was silent, & we were drifting close to each other, & I was aware of her looking me over as though I was a curious sample of the creature - man.

"Is this a hint of yours?"

"Not exactly."

"Oh, but so very so early."

Again I felt nettled.

"Well, you, the happy fat idea. She won't answer, & a cross country that is waiting. And I have a force a bit. A mysterious sea to keep fit."

We had drifted down to Hartfield, & I saw her look at the old home, & her face seemed to soften. ^{the house} She had the same sun behind it, & the cedar & the high chimney cast long shadows, & there was a soft glow upon the flowers & grasses. She & the moon were in the twilight, & the home seemed to smile as if it had watched their married year or more go by.

I glanced at her & saw her look more.

"Does that help you to keep fit?"

"Perhaps."

"Saidie & outside."

Actually she smiled, & about I added - "And in my long chamber."

But a sudden little cloud drifted across the sun, & I saw that woman's smile vanish. We were drifting & looking past the house, & ^{came} some opposite the boat-house & of a sudden it occurred to me to wonder whether Mrs. W. Mallory had blushed about that picture.

I said - "That old home is full of ghosts. It had its tragedy, - but now home - hill & sea people - manage to stay whole. ~~and~~ ^{swam}."

She seemed to consider these words of mine.

"Perhaps - because it is old. - Do you think it is easy for the young to be sure, - you, in these days?"

I looked hard at her, but she did not look at me.

"No, - I don't. - We have lost all the mystery that might have been."

She gave a smothered little laugh.

"Fighting! - You, perhaps for the sake of a successful fight."

Had I been completely the hard-boiled idealist I might have found her bitter jealousy & attraction. How very pleasant to weather it in hot embrace, & have the summer for his life, but somehow I did not feel that way about her. Soapy, romantic fellow! I began to suspect that the Palace of Pleasure was indeed her no place of peace for her, but a home of stark necessity. Money, a money for what? Honey? - Hardly so. I could not see her as one of those embittered beauties who would sell that quality to ravaging elderly cash. No, just what had been her background, & what was the thing she had suffered.

I said "very early" - "I have been lucky. Small people
are born to a craft. It is there or not there. One
should not feel doubtful about it."

She seemed to be watching the play of light on the water.
 Why could'nt she be friend with me? How can she too
 be pushed apart the creature - man?

Any I ask you a question?

She gave me an about fifteen d space.

"I don't welcome you here."

"No? - That was when -"

And suddenly she dropped her paddles & began to turn the
pump, & I just lay on my back & watched her.

I said - "I'm a little sensitive about this."

Did you tell you that I had painted nearly just
memory.

Her presence still stirred the water, & she had become
profile to me.

Q. S do not answer question.

4 Well then - forgive me for asking them,

I let her go for I did more than a feeling that she might be grateful for Simon's restraint. He gave her welcome! Was not the difference obvious? She had some unhappy happenings to hide. And was she so general about life that a discreet card-shop like "The Mercantile" was just heaven to her? She just didn't care. She might be the philosophy of the age of decay & decadence when you could buy a girl for a bottle of gin or a bucket of piss.

And yet I got going again, but I recalled down stream, I once a bird a lot right off her, but the

question she had posed me with took shape. Could a woman who was utterly disinclined choose to leave her bed at nine in the morning & to find beauty & solitude upon the river? Hardly so. And I had supposed upon her one hour of self-escape.

I was up again early next morning, but no post came down stream. Was it that she wished for no contact, & had remembered her little house? So, instead I left my stuff in the boat-house, & took a run across for St. John's meadow. Yes, the post had gone off & then I saw it lying motionless under a weeping willow.

(After Page 48)

I had no urge to escape for an hour or so from the "Pneadown" misadventure. I got up at nine when Mr. de Chas was alive, & took out one of the portholes. The early morning air was clear, & the water & the willow. I let the boat drift down stream, & it was while under the bridge while carried the road who I saw - him. He was in his out-spread shirt & smiling straight for me as though the whole world was his.

I had to shout or we should have collided, & he stopped his boat, looked over a shoulder & saw me.

No escape for me. I tried to be facetious, but it was shallow & he had me in deep water. I said something silly about being up in the morning early, & he said it was the idea of sleeping fit.

He looked at me, & said a rising & strong.

He said a craftsman had to sleep fit, & that physical fitness was the essential for technique. For technique. Was he talking for effect? No, I don't think so.

He had drifted down, & was opposite the old house. This was the first time I had seen it, & it had a most curious effect on me. Gracious & lovely, it made me feel truly a child, like some part was pushed down inside a kind of beauty. I caught his look at me in a queer, smiling way, as though he had guessed how I was feeling. He began to tell me about the house, & I realized that he loved it with beauty.

A house full of memory, ghosts, human happenings. It had known joy & sorrow, I knew, & love & war. It seemed had the tone of tragedy, & yet - he said it was a release & a necessary bond & full of a full of mystery. I could believe it. He said it was so apart from the modern struggle & jumble & hubbly, & that it gave him the peace he would work for.

He was talking to me as to one who could understand, & these intimate words of his made me feel strangely moved to him. Then he said something about family, a portrait from memory, & I - the tough again - found myself slipping into absurd shyness, you just. He said something about a house, & about what? The water & the willow & the glorious old house, & a man

who seemed somewhat different from other men.

How ridiculous! I had suddenly heard of the matter & me, I said I had to get back to the day's work.

He smiled a bit & went on. There was a kind of restraint & they all about him.

Shouldn't you feel - are you getting out of hand?



IX

I am a big fellow & I have heard it said that big men are much less than ^{the} little ones, who have to straddle a way to make up for an inclined body, but I don't think the combination holds good. I have known one or two one-eyed fellows whose self-reliance was prodigious, & I was to ^{include} ~~include~~ among them. But of our male-caveat said it was, had been chartered by Sheldon Mallory. I think I have said earlier that woman I have been kind to me, & even in such a situation success can make a man but bigger than the one who has closed pelticoath & finished to capture them. And here was a guy whom who could keep me at a distance, & I was puzzled by it, & it was more than pipe. The possibility of some postulate may be easy, & other encouragement, & now had I attempted to express so baffling a hint, what a loss.

Now I follow in line with a guy whom who snatched me.

I can lay now over my own almost bygone instance. And was she Harwood's mother?

My emotional reaction to that possibility should have warned me how damably serious the brain could be.

I surely would not believe it.

I decided that it was about time I paid the club another visit & on Saturday was the gala night I chose the following Saturday. It was to be a man-dictate affair that I had foreseen, & quite early in the evening car began to crank in. I had not bothered to put on a dinner jacket, & I crossed the road in a loose suit to find D.C. Gater standing under the hedge. Altered car was parked beside the road, & yet more were arriving & the occupants were very well dressed.

"Good like a money wing, Sam."

He grinned at me.

"Are you a member, sir?"

"Yes. - In the power of observation. Any explanation?"

"I have order to watch some of these cars, sir."

"I'm not surprised. - By the way, if I notice any thing

interest I'll pass it on to you"
"That's all."

"That you, sir."

Con to the right of one, con to the left of one, & I had to
take to the place. Drink was being served at the garden
table, & there was plenty of colour & gabble. It struck me
as being either a very silly or a very clever, a grin & giggle
show. And then I ran slap into Harwood. He looked more
swollen & greasy than usual. Had that black forelock
of his now ~~travelling~~.

Even, Dr. Byson, I'm afraid I. J. are our rule.

"Even for a drink & dinner?"

" All our tables are removed. We are having two separate diners."

" Paynatahah. - Well, I'll conform.

I had a feeling that he was with me like a savage & suspicious ball, & that he might have unpleasant means of taking down for the his greenish white hostility. Was I too much of a night-bloom, or had I not already been blabbing about the picture she had measured in my studio?

Meanwhile a large black Rolls came rolling up to the house,
 & Howard became the welcome ^{unborn} southern host. He

saluted the car with vociferance & went to open the door to a very agreeable & sweet lady & a fat man with a fresh, fair face, & a brimful of profitable patronage. I had a good look at Howard as he bowed over Macdonald's hand. He had curly, wavy hair, like a boy with a couple of years at such. The streak of black hair might have been grafted to his low forehead, & his big, broad-shouldered head seemed to sit about neckless on his massive shoulders. Big, a powerful build, but far too fat. He might last for two months in a fairly tight coat, but was good right to the chair or over the table, & then might put his down a bit.

He was among the beggelled lady to the porch, & even his
voice was muffled & hallowing. The fat man waddled after
her, & I gathered that he was much less important than
madame. Much more here - most certainly. I watched them
disappear into the house, at that moment the Saturday
dinner had come to life in the house.

The Sanbitt walk! How opposite!

I went back a changed, & Betty managed to scrounge a cold snack for me. Stoddard told I would take the boys, & that they need not sit up for me, for I could

tell of Bill's face that his old war wound was hurting him. A shell of plaster had cracked his spine.
"That poor, dear."

It is good to be able to trust some people, & to feel good with them. I looked at Bill & Betty & he looked back. They were loyal, & did not exploit me, & I think that Huntfield was a happy home for them.

I got a pipe & a tobacco pouch in my pockets, though I imagined that the President was far too much a Cash Show to tolerate pipe, like that gentleman who in Pall Mall was fat & wore a thick cigar, but a good hybrid pipe is forbidden. I stalked across into a ^{magical} ~~magical~~ of Soggy & nibble a little & giggle. I was daisy in the lounge, & when I walked into the bar I found two or three couples daisy there. Soldera Malloy was behind the bar, & dressed in an antique kind of black frock buttoned up to her throat ~~about~~ like a ^{pepp} ~~pepp~~ time. She ^{appeared} took the to be all occupied, but I found a vacant perch at the end of the bar.

My neighbor happened to be the chairman of one with the black cavalry ~~man~~ ^{man} who had been here the previous Saturday. Even at the early stage of the war he had had too much to drink, & he was climbing on up to glare against the rail of the bar. I don't think Soldera had seen me, for she was being kept busy, & she appeared to be in no hurry to attend to this little man.

"Hi, - Soggy, darling -"

She glanced in our direction & saw me. How I fancy myself, or did I appear to be some sort of attribute to Soggy & giggle? She came towards me.

"Good even, Mr. Pagan."

She ignored the young man & his twinkling glass, & he turned & stared at me.

"May I have a gin & lime?"

The young gentleman protested. He was one of those who who saw questions who in drink.

"Here, hold on, - you're battling in."

I smiled at him.

"Set my foot - my back."

He took that as an insult.

"Pardon?"

Soldera ignored him, & turned away to mix my drink, & the little idiot fished his rilly pencil out.

"I asked you a question."

"Yes, I think you did."

"So what?"

Solda came to face us with a glass in her hand. She did not look at my neighbour. She placed the glass in front of me, as if she did so. I saw the lady ~~and~~ ^{and} put it forward. He backed it up, and the glass rolled off the counter & crashed on the floor.

My right hand shot out - I gripped his wrist. I looked in his face & smiled.

"Dad be an arr."

~~be an~~
I dug my finger nails into his wrist. I was hurting him & I meant to hurt him. He winced, & tried to turn away, but I held him hard & fast, & I kept on smiling.

"Sorry, Dan Malloy. May I have another? - Perhaps my next door neighbour will join me."

I smiled at him. I had him cornered & tamed. He gave a rich grin & murmured.

"No, - my show, an'. Damed close of me."

I released his wrist, & patted him on the shoulder.

Solda had her back to us, running drabs, & when she turned to face us - all was peace. Alcoholic reactions are swift & thoroughly rich, & my neighbour was looking at me as at some admired big brother. ~~As if he was joining in me.~~

Solda placed the glass before us, & I pulled out my wallet.

"How much, Dan Malloy?"

"Ten shillings, Dan Byrnes."

But my sudden new friend protested.

"No, no, - mine please. I owe for three -"

She was looking at him with tolerant amusement.

"And - a glass, Dan Malloy."

"Yes, of course, the glass. Damed close of me."

I allowed the poor little wife to pay. I had contrived to calm a storm & a teasing without a public rebuke. There was no such move & and my elbow was no absorbed in each other that the affair had passed almost unnoticed.

I laid my glass to Dan Malloy.

"Happy days."

He laid his & giggled at me.

"Good old sport, Dan."

I could have purchased the old. At thirty seven I am fitter than most men of who were of prime at ten years. I took a raised my glass to Solda. One you met, & for the first

"Smacked his face good & hard. - It brought him round all right. He was a good lad."

She put out a hand & dropped the ash from her cigarette into an ash-tray.

"So - you believe in rough discipline?"

"That depends on the person. - But just -"

"Bye."

"No, I was going to be friendly."

She gave me a quick look.

"Should"

"Should I hesitate? - Self discipline - just."

I nodded at her.

"I see - oh Queen."

Her face had lost its frown, & had softened to me. We were alone now in the bar. - I noticed that the dance band was playing a waltz - a thing from "Butter-Scotch".

I stood up & looked at her.

"Will you dance with me?"

She hesitated.

"I'm a dolt."

"Please. - I wish quite badly."

She rose, stubbed out her cigarette, & moved towards a fly in the bar counter. I kissed it & held it up for her. - We danced.

Never had I danced with anyone who could move as she did. It was music in movement, & it thrilled me. We did not speak. - I think we were both lost in the exquisite rhythm of that waltz, when I heard his voice.

"Come on, Mr Byers, - my bar-maid does not dance with - visitors."

Bar-maid! How mean I was to smudge him in the face!

But I held myself in, both because I had felt her go rigid, & because a row might be far more sinister for her than for me. She had dropped my hand & drawn away. I made myself smile at Howard. The cunning of country might be more subtle than open warfare.

"Sorry, Mr Howard. - I was the offender."

Howard had gone back behind the bar, & was collecting glasses, & his hands were deliberate, & graceful, yet they seemed to be moving to some music. Howard stood there waiting & watching me, & I got the impression that he thought I was nervous of him. I well, let him think it.

I felt for my pipe, & produced it.

"Is - the - allowed?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Byers."

2 Labeled.

" I seem to be very much out of order tonight."

He was both suband talented.

"be set a certain standard line, Don Byrd."

" I quite understand, - And you are responsible.

"I am."

2 expected in p.p.

" But allowed in the garden.

" You may go & smoke your pipe in the garden, Mr. Byrd."

"Thank you" The Howard.

I think he ^{supposed} found that he had surprised me, but he still stood there, anyway some of himself. And then a bunch of people drifted in up to the bar. So I da-
toned the barman then. I walked out past Howwood into
the large court into the garden, & filled a lot of pipe.

I had a mixed bag of emotions than can contain in his
 I strolled down to the river over the soft dark grass, I
 knew that I was a love, & that I hated, that there was
 laughter in me. I - the somewhat celebrated Robert Ryan
 had fallen for a chestnut haired bar-maid! Damn him
 for being that way! And had he assumed that I was a
 being to be brow-beaten & pushed about as he pleased. Oh,
 delicious irony! - Part of me was still willing with
 her. Bitter-Sweet. Yes, she was that very creature in
 that world of music, & he the tough, sexual bully. - But if
 it came to fists or swords -? A machine-gun would win
 me. I stood & stood by the river, & the night was a
 Pachelbel Dream.

O ye gods, - I - the creature had fallen for a creature in
 whom God's gift had manifested supremely. - After, - with tenderness
 & that strange reserve which calls on almost mystic, slow
 we named Love. Dear, romantic fool, - Better David. Certainly,
 kept that was the name for him. Then was I no secret. I would
 play the better game for him until I had him in the
 predicted course - & the -
 stalked,

I wandered back into the home, & ^{strolled} ~~wandered~~ here a while, observing history. People were dining; one or two couples were cuddling close round tables; I solo had a whisky brotherhood at the bar. But I missed certain people, the bewitched dame & her pink-pu faced escort, young Doolittle, & Horwood

himself, & their absence intrigued me.

I looked for the place where "gentlemen are not disturbed," and found a door in a darkish passage. I tried it & found it locked, but there were voices on the other side of the door & they were not stuff voices. I walked rather rapidly. I waded into the bar, & a bold & smiling man & a lean coat-headed fellow whose black hair seemed to be slipping off his head, both eyed me with hostility. Conversation was not welcomed. I strolled out into the garden & round the house to a part which my fit companion the room with a locked door, & I came upon two heavily curtained & closed windows. I stood & listened to muffled voices.

Ha, ha, the card room! And what kind of game was played in there? Hunt Bridge, or Poker, or did a little backgammon? I puffed a bit another pipe, & watched the snow the grass. I noticed that star was shining. I came opposite the window of the bar, & one of them was a French window & open. A big year tree stood near, & I moved into its deep shade & leaned against the trunk.

I have just have been premonition's of caution. I saw a
figure emerge. I walked. And then another figure, the both the
dark & black, both of Harold Horwood.

He said - "You will go back - at once, Bella."

His voice was threatening.

"My name is not Bella."

" Write to me, my dear.

" Sim. trial - right of being an exhibit for each.

"I live in a place where I can't see far profit. You may play the bloody game, but I play you to know the good, especially the old ones."

I could see them by the light of the large window, but to them I was part of the shadow of the pew. I turned the bowl of my pipe with one hand & now stood stock still. She was a short nine between them. She was bent up, tense, & in the half light her face looked blacked, & there was no breath in her hair.

She said - "Have you no pity?"

She said - "Have you no pity."
All she got from her was a barbarous laugh, & the cynical
rebuttal.

"Plenty if you come to see it. I'm rather of a collector,
my dear."

"Dear? - O O
Cretia? Had he some hold over her? And his of deary
of her was maki' me feel savage. I watched her, & know a
had go to her forehead. " 2 10 10

" You were rather different - when I accepted -"

"No need to play the sweet innocent. - Captain Carter was an inferior rascal. You'll admit that."

"Oh, for God's sake - shut up."

"A chance & so promising. Vienna night, & all that. I could have warned you."

"Oh, yes, you could have warned me."

"Useful information, of course. - An officer's window - what, with no panes, & a plant of S. Johnson. Safe window!"

I saw him move suddenly towards the window, & he was gone out.

"No, don't touch me."

She forgot that he, & I had a clanked fist ready. If he tried to mob-bush me - I knew that I - But he didn't pass. She was gone back to what might be to be a kind of pillow, & to the emptiness of all those silly faces. I waited & watched him. So the page could hold some hold over her. I felt like taking him by the throat & choking the hell out of him.

He followed her through the window, & I held back under the shadow of the tree.

What a right! What can I make of it?
 That he helped me with that dear little arm.
 Then - I dined with him. And what a picture!
 Carthy - Hammond. He was just what to Robert Byron
 - the Don accepted it, played down ^{o was never}
 by? To put me in ^{present} a row? - About I
 could have wished him to ^{show} that arrogant fat face.
 So Mr Robert Byron just colored chocolate, all down -
 me with when a rough-house theater.
 He handled the little fellow no more, but backed down to the
 by one.
 Oh, picture more!

I am beginning to be afraid of the great green beast.
 Hated a pair so together.
 That last cloud with his next one ^{could} a shining
 What a fool I was to be ^{ced} with the best. And yet
 he was ⁱⁿ Vienna a hour. I suppose he thinks that he
 can ^{see} me into ^{remains}.
 How utterly ^{amazing}!
 No wonder I look my down.

X

Have begun, part time doctor & barmaid, such was the
disturbance in your. How did I find out these details? Well,
my mind, but find them out I did.

And who was the mysterious Captain Carter? She knew nothing
of the war was still alive all over Europe, & I was one of the
few who did not dwell upon an Island by himself.

Thurs. 17. For but I promised me during the next few days, &
I will admit that I was a very long way to myself, & without
staying any of immediate contacts. I had had some secret of
my own & supposed for it a fear of it, and I dare to play
the Cochinwar & the romantic & thrilling tale. I think
now that I was wiser than I had in being such a waiting.
She might regard all men as tainted, with some suspicion,
& I had a feeling that if there was to be any signal it
should come from her.

Meanwhile the weather was not fair, & from John & I they
was struggling to get in a tangle of hay. He was short of
labour, for two men had walked out on him, & men
will when the little silver have come to assume that they
are more important than the master. It seemed to me that
helping with that was a good job for any man who had
fate. I went down a volunteer, & a third & fourth
day I was blessed me.

It was not to work in a field of the moon. Much of the crop
was laid & had to be cut by hand, & I will confess that
I am as good with a scythe, but I could wield a
sickle, rake & pitchfork. I have assigned me the
flattened tangle grass next to the river, for as the higher ground
the region could handle the crop that had been here
mowed up by gales & rain.

I was a known short & bright, & our garden stood the
Meadow, with its garden table & shelter like giant
sagebrush in full bloom. A lot of its father appeared to
remain during the week, & they came & sat there & smoked
a real book in paper. I saw Howard strolling about among
them on occasion, & playing the wicker sort, but at once did
I see Sarah. It was on a Sunday afternoon, & I was departing
for one of the staff, & carrying tea tray set into the garden.
There were no children in the garden, & the great bold white
house suggested a sterile spirit.

The day was dying well with the evening walk, & the program

of it was the smell of high summer, & gradually the weather lost
their greenness. We staid & staid at ^{them} & I was fairly good, & a
ready for much beer, poor stuff though it was. I had blundered a
land with so much noble work, & had to stop it, & for the
time being of paint on the river did not materialize. The overland
port part out for the Meadows & paddled on poles lightly
past the willows.

I was much close down to the water one morning when I heard

I was washed close down to the water and making when I heard
a voice calling me, a fit boomed away.

"I am a farmer, Mr. Byan."

"I saved James, Dan Byers?"
 St. man. Howwood. He stood with his feet wide apart, his
 bolsters on a studding, he had a way of waggling his hips as he
 stood. I leaned over my pitchfork & faced at him. His white
 shirt was open at the throat, & his baggy grey trousers bulged
 over his belly.

"found for the reduction of fat" said S.

I could find the reflection of the
could see the round thin flared face.

"Rechnung - ad - abend, was!"

So certain fellow!

"Facetious fellow," said S. "System of belts in the
"by not trying it." "fashioned & variable Bigger."
He swung it & for an in marriage legs."

He swung to a free an in massive legs.

"Auntie" close at hand, Mr. Bryan,

"Quite so" I said, & went on with my work.

Continued - indeed! I don't suppose he had ever denied himself anything which his large power could not elated, women, food, drink, and cash, the bow-bow of wealth men. He would be loath to deny even a his capacity for procreating, and the satisfaction of men I could imagine a striking neighbor. Which all goes to show that I was momentary by the fellow, a his implacable manner to Golder. I had the feeling that a man like Howard would stick at nothing, - a locked door would not save a woman from being raped by him.

I grabbed the fork into the ground, & adjoined for help a
pigeon. I sat down on the new bank & looked around at
that most sinister house. Howland had wandered up to one
of the mullins & was talking to a woman in a deck chair.
I saw him turn & point in my direction, & I seemed to
catch a hint of belly laugh. So, I gave a go to the
Pseudos. And he thought that I was afraid of him. I bit
hard on my pipe, & the string & me rimmed.

I backed my popi out, got up a wall back to where I had left my pitchfork. I happened to glance again at the house, & at one of the gabled windows I saw a figure. It appeared to be seated there. It was Selda. Was she waiting for her day's routine? I did not want to be but went on with the job of taming her. The stuff was pretty dry now, & up above where I stood & she chafed was loading & carrying it in to the big Dutch barn at the back yard. I glanced once or twice at the window, & she was still there, like some motionless creature in a little recess under a white cliff.

The afternoon produced an embarrassing incident. We had begun to load & cart the hay for the second part above the river, & I was further piling up the stuff to Stage on the wagon when I heard a voice.

"Oh, - Mr. Brown."

John Stage looked at me.

"Look down there, he's in a pent."

I peered about & saw Selda Bentley, & I was not pleased. The first was for a day on Dutch, & Selda Bentley was holding on to a willow branch, & was colorful from a white & civic. She beckoned to me, & I made the best of it, & went to speak to her.

"Oh, - Mr. Brown, aren't you Maxwell?"

Maxwell, was I? Well, I did not want to be Maxwell to the particular lady, though she looked at me as though I was a frog stalling.

"Isn't giving a hand in a civic?"

"Aren't you brown. - I can come down today. George is busy with some new Company or other. - He will be down for the week end."

I rather wished that George was plenty with her instead of being involved in other flotation. However, I saw Selda down a window & carrying out a tea-tray to one of the lower tables.

"I'm now your husband in a very big way."

John Stage was waiting in the Day-dream, & time was passing.

"You'll have to excuse me. - I'm holding up the looking."

She giggled.

"Do come a drink & dance with us on Saturday."

I am afraid I lied to her.

" So sorry. I have some friends for the week end."

" By not being there along."

I laughed.

" Unfortunately - one of them is an old gentleman of seventy. He often has a sunny day. You, John, - come."

I gave him a Beam of the smile, a natural to duty. The feeling of day. I smiled up at John Stage, a young man who looked at me.

" I am sorry, sir."

" Say good-bye. He has just packed off."

" He has, sir."

Abbottbridge

The day was in, John Stage a somewhat happy man, a on the Saturday morning I took the car a drive in the State Abbott. Saturday morning is always Saturday morning was a such rural place, a shopping shopping ^{chaotic} with hundreds of ladies who might have been hunting the last egg - the one last time of the year in a world that would blow up at midnight.

Abbottbridge

I managed to find a place to park the car, which was not easy, with bicycles propped precariously along the pavement, a other car left with the bumper sticking out into the road, & left the by the privileged rich. I was nearly out of tobacco, & I wanted some gum & Bonanza, a Vermont. If they did any. State Abbott did possess a formidable little wine shop, a the price of the grape has become more favorable, a few more entered a the eastern side of the country.

I got my tobacco, with a box of matches thrown in, & at "Smith" I changed a book, & bought two "Papers". The wine-shop lay just beyond the church, & the door was 10.15. I fifteen minutes waited to wait before an individual farmhouse would permit me to emerge with bottle of gum. I might have carried it into the church and at 10.31, I got sharply drunk on it, a the wine-shop what would have incurred no responsibility. I had a bonnach with me, & the shop door was unlocked. I entered & found myself free to go on with

I left the car with the policeman by the inspection of the th. She saw the pack I had seen her at Pasadena, & the same little tilted cap of gold upon her hair. Our greeting was quite formal.

" Good morning, Miss Phyllis."

"Good morning, Mr. Byan."

Mr. Byan & the Mayor were alone in the shop. Sandra had a bag of paper in one hand, - a shopping list. She sat down on a high chair, & smiled at me a little sweetly.

"You had better take my tea."

"Not a bit of it."

"I have a rather large order for the club."

I glanced at the clock.

"I am not legally entitled to walk out with a bottle of gin."

I saw a police constable by the telephone booth.

"The Mayor smiled at each other, & I sat down on a second vacant chair, & waited."

As she had said her list was a long one, & the order a delivery affair. The Mayor was very polite to her, as well he might be. I had sampled the Club drinks, & their prices, & I will admit that Howard's drinks were as least as his price were dishonest. I glanced at the shelves, & saw some Brandy, & a bottle of English vermouth, & while Sandra was checking her list I asked the available question.

"Got any gin?"

"Yes, Mr. Byan."

"And Martell?"

"Sorry, sir. Just one bottle came in & they have gone."

I saw Sandra had tea.

"We are the guilty people. - Take me off my list for Mr. Byan."

"That's very generous of you, Miss Mallory."

"I don't think so."

The Mayor produced my bottle of gin & one of Martell, & two of Pilsener. I paid, & was pushing them into my handbag when Sandra rose.

"To our monthly account, Mr. Shack."

"That's all right, Miss."

I went to open the door for her.

"I have a car here. Can I give you a lift?"

"There's a bar, Mr. Byan."

"Quite so. One on each, & a random two on wheels."

"I can wait if you have more to do."

She gave me an oblique look, & no smile.

"It's very kind of you."

"Not a bit. - I should call it common sense, & a rational use of petrol."

That brought a smile from her.

"I'll accept - comma name."

"Splendid! - It rather reminds me of Paddyton."

Had I said the wrong thing? Anyhow she did not give at it. We passed the young constable, & he glared at my husband. I glared at him.

"Hearst the clock clock, officer."

He had, & he returned my stare.

We walked along ~~St. John's~~ ^{High Street} to where I had left the car. I say - walked. It was like dodging a low fence that was in motion all over the path. Someone stayed my way, & the bottles protested. Opening car doors caused more confusion. I saw good madams with parasols. Dashed down on us abreast, jabbing to each other, & clashing the whole pavement. I stopped in front of them, & raised my hat.

"Where do we go from here, ladies? Into the gallery or through a shop window?"

They gave me surprised & wary looks, but I stood there in front of St. John's, & one of them had to hold back. We passed on, & so did they, & I heard one say to the other "Cheeky brasher - that."

So, we come to my car & a problem. One feminine bike with loaded shopping basket was propped against the curb, & almost touching my new pair of moccasins. Another was especially prohibitive at the wheel. Someone had parked a car there just from the curb, & block me in if I attempted to go forward. How could I remove, for another car was ahead, & my tail. I suppose that in these congested, shop-sprouting days people can be crushingly stupid, if one calls it nothing else.

"But of a problem here."

I opened the main door for St. John's.

"Better get in a wait, Miss Mallory. Patience is still a virtue. Or - is it?"

"I wonder!"

She got in a look of husband from me & placed it on the next bench seat. And then the young constable of the Telephone Booth came strolling up, & I put the problem to him.

"What do I do, officer?"

He looked at the bike & the car parked well out in the roadway.

"I'll wait, sir. Hope it's a gentleman."

It wasn't. A tough, young larkie came emerged from a cake shop
 & shuffled to the car. "By your kind assistance?"

"Is that your car, madam?"

"It is."

"May I suggest that you can be summoned for parking a car
 like that?"

"And why - if I may ask?"

"If you can't see that, madam, - well -"

She giggled at him.

"I don't want any assistance, that you - If you police would
 organize this better."

"I will try to do so - now, madam. Will you please move
 your car. And I will take your name as a reference for
 future reference."

She obeyed & started her engine, & with a glance at him,
 went off with a jerk & without looking in the mirror. A
 car coming up behind blared a horn, & just continued to
 move on.

I smiled at the cartable.

"Capitulation in your country, officer. - Not easy to ^{organize}
 resist you."

He smiled at me.

"I believe, - sir!"

I appreciated his irony.

He moved the forward bike for me, & I got in a
 managed to ease my way out.

She was sitting in the back seat & directly behind me so that
 I could not see her. It seemed a rather unhygienic arrangement,
 but I had a feeling that she might prefer it. Also, I wanted to
 make some sort of indirect approach to her, & it might be
 easier when we were not face to face.

I had to look to avoid a girl cyclist who turned right
 without a signal.

"Not very helpful, of course! - All these good women ^{new} to be
 slightly ~~crude~~ made."

Her reaction surprised me.

"Many of them are, I'm afraid, - poor wretches."

"Poor women -"

"Life is not very easy for most women nowadays."

Had I been refused, I probably might say no.

"I see just how much, but not for women."

She did not answer me for a moment.

"It is a little more subtle than that."

"Well, tell me -"

"There can be so like a cucumber, actually much. A distinctive

little heart."

"And would he be looking up after me."

Again there was a pause. I had a feeling that I was in very shallow water, & she - in the depths of reality.

"I think I know what you mean."

"Do you?"

"Why should I?"

"You have no mind."

"Well, tell me at once that I have lived & have a very protected life."

"I think you have."

That puzzled me. - ^{My} a protected life? Did she regard me as a decorative & spilt play boy? I was successful & secure. Well, wasn't I? - And she -?

I said - "Say, Miss Mallory, you may be right. I'm so deep in the back balance & your photograph. She's been treated me kindly. - So it all back."

I was a fool. I was driving slowly. I wanted to make the journey last as long as possible.

"Sartin, Mr. Bryant, it may be that carry too much for certain thing - make us from discolored fools."

"Meaning - you haven't?"

"No, not necessarily. I was thinking of some who may have to suffer - because of - men."

That astonished me, not as a statement, but because she had gone so far as to say it to me. - I felt moved, accused, almost humiliated. For the moment I did not know what to say to her.

But she was speaking again & in a very different voice, brightly, cautiously, & with deliberate intent.

"Well, summer at last. You must have enjoyed the holiday."

Was I to know her, or challenge the change & the conversation? I decided to conform.

"I did. - I had a real sort of job."

"Did your back ache, Mr. Bryant?"

Was she talking to me? Very nice with me?

"Sincerely invited, Miss Mallory. I happen to be rather tough. I do mean - paper over tough."

She did not answer that question.

But we were nearly home, & I heard a further movement behind me.

"Do you mind dropping me at the gate?"

"Why should I? I drive you in."

"The gate, if you don't mind."

I understood her answer, & it was not a pleasant one.

"Of course. - Oh, by the way, - I shall not be at the Club on Saturday."

"No."

"A Dan Bledley walked me to join them. I am afraid I told a white lie."

I saw the gate ahead of me, & I drove on at the side of the road, & got out to open the door for her, but she was not before I could reach her. She gave me one straight, steadfast look.

"Thank you, Dan Bledley."

"I wish you had more to thank me for."

She had no answer to that, but turned & walked toward the white gate-pillars of her prison. I felt it to be a prison.

XI

I suppose we imaginative people are more sensitive to impressions than the average person, & can sometimes wander. It is like the weather, especially the light weather, & I could quite occasion when the world of the senses became unbelievable, ^{to me} as it was, as though some weird glow was projected upon it from within, from visionary illumination, a psychic dawn or sunset. Ben Franklin the Tree, stark though he was, seemed to change his moods & his gestures. I have seen his den's remote, & brilliant & mean to me. Just a thaplex.

But what of our spiritual thaplex? I am one of those who cannot creep from a hair of my tongue, nor would I wish to creep from it, for I am the child of such a matter. There would days when I felt free, when I could divine things not evident to the material senses. I had but to put out a hand & draw aside a curtain, & so - ^{myself} ~~myself~~ things would be revealed to me.

ultimate

What said to many of the gay cynical moderns. Sirs might be all right to Rock to the, or I can Amherst, & I think there was a spirit, the creature was right, & stark. I think much of the trouble came from our pseudo-intellectual being isolated from the world of hands. I have found more ~~often~~ wisdom in some of the rough folk who labour close to nature, far labour, shipwreck, failure. They are less remote from the eternal challenge of being things. Of our lower air capacity for of marvels and in death.

So, almost without realising it, & as though the old house I dwell in had eyes, I began to get a picture of the place as a garden & of her.

The Howard Hall, a climbing den, a rope-hoisted, a gambling house, a retreat for some of the new rich who had more bells than hands. Harold Howard was no fool. He knew how to enter for his world, & may be it was a profitable affair.

And he had now told me this.

confant

Many! Did she need many, & for what? For some other than money? I could suppose that gratification might be considerable, pleasure in chess, plots, & that she might comfort these fools & accept that which came to her, while holding them off with cool aloofness, courtesy.

Also, & I thought the feeling that she was in danger, & that he

defence might be very thin. A locked door, & what was a locked door to an equally powerful brute like Howard? And was he to leave his way with him to force, he would never ^{mean} open the door to appeal to the law - that he had been a ^{competent} partner, & yes can be turned & locked down, & if there is no way that a duplicate could be provided.

I expect that few ^{men} of the world will believe me who I say that I did not credit what to the world have been obvious, that the war 400,000 soldiers. I would ask if any man would accept such a part as he, I such a hole without being a creature of turmoil, a ~~human~~ ^{human} opinion.

10 " Dear fellow, don't be such a sloppy ass."

Half the kids in a ninth grade at a public school could have raised that to some.

Well, I just did not believe it, believe it who will.

[illegible]

The Orchard was a somewhat what-of home that week. No yellow snail on the lawn, no plants upon the river, & the wood-and crowd did not appear to be as plentiful as usual. I paid it no visit, in spite of my mother's. Apollo came down on the Saturday, & we had an hour with the girls on the lawn between the river & the house. I was not a favor, but like a piece of wild wine, & he pointed me thither.

"Battle, no, battle,"

Butler? That would rather expressed it, a Gaelic brown
eyed hair challenged me. I have heard the Scotch abroad,
but personally I had found them the kindest of people. And
some of our best friends who were fed a different diet by the
Catholics.

I said - "I'm, afraid. You light is as good as

your foil."

"It is a great lay-up, in."

"But for more."

"Go, home, in."

be tried again, or prepared to be more deliberate & flexible
and I caught sight of a passing point with raised hands
up & pointing. Shoulda, she was looking up at me, & that put
me off guard. Angelo touched me over the heart. How significant!
I laughed, & related the point with raised foil, & she
waved to me.

"Well & really touched, Angelo."

He gave me a sharp look. He was a quiet method in
our foil.

I left behind Jimmy Slaughter & asked him to come down
a block on the Sunday. In fact I had written & asked him
to pick up any youngster he could, up a certain person
back ground. But Sunday on the Sunday, Jimmy arrived in a
merry mood & with an admirable black eye. One of his sparring
partners had scored somewhat respectfully.

"Well, well, well" said I.

"Good for our vanity, in."

"And what did you do to him?"

"I took him an extra drink."

That was Jimmy all over. And at last he drank nothing
but cider.

I know that Jimmy & his crowd thought me an ancient sort
of fellow, but rather liked me for it. However, Jimmy was not
the historic he was the pretentious to be, & in a fight he
had to keep fit, & he had had adventure of his own. I
don't know whether any of you men who may read this have
felt the urge to play the contigator of noble code of
independent brother, but Jimmy had fallen for that inspiration. Even
a part can be did, but he chose it like a gentleman, &
I believe his adventure in contigation had been prompted by
the inducement of the open road. It had begun with the
blackguarding of a boy down a highway to Court House, who,
in Sooner or later had taken Jimmy side off the
road, & pushed him on to the grass verge. Jimmy had
himself, should he, pulled his car down the road, &
proceeded to lecture the fellow, & the chap - being angry &
light, had left him next & accepted the challenge. Deceit
for the fellow, Jimmy had given him, & the student had no

figured my friend that he had taken to himself the duty of dealing with ^{nothing} ^{anybody} else. There was nothing of the bully in Sam. He could be the quietest & most unobtrusive of creatures, but the bully reared the machine devil in him.

"Well, my sidekick or my new neighbor," had taken to tell. So Sam's best friend. One of two of his fish had taken to tell. So would appear that Howard had been an amateur being right in his day, & had thrown his weight about. He & an old ally tough had acted as check-out in his own particular Sack & night club, but as I had suspected - the place had come by no winter a reputation that Howard had closed it - or sold it, a candidate to exploit a more electric & elevated show in night Sam.

"That's a nice place, Sam."

"Not at all, no." He knew how to exploit the money crowd that who would mention.

"What you would call a Sam. I have never met one. Are there such people?"

"Plenty." Reached up against me but would not wait to tell me a case of what you find from a bottle.

"And did you know him?"

"No, just a dirty little fellow, not worth knowing."

I did not tell Sam about Sordas, but I did confess that I had been a member of the club - for reasons of my own.

"Don't a bit of detecting."

I nodded at him & smiled.

"I would it mind getting the place shut up. I don't like the fellow, or the crowd he trades on."

"How he been under to you."

"He has. - I rather believe he takes me a living."

Sam checked.

"That means more than you've met with," & his face became serious - "I'd watch out for yourself - if you ever get into a row over there."

"Pleading?"

"I don't think of heart can be made, all sorts of ^{duty} ^{tricks}."

"I think he is flabby, of lead."

"May be he is, but he might have a rough home on you."

My pipe had come out - I spit it.

"By the way - do you if the fellow has a wife?"

Sam gave me one of his menacing looks.
 "Wife? That's not what I'm doing in my morning. I'm
 making it with a little of the old-fashioned 'I'm not a
 I blow smoke."

"I'm not a male fly-paper."

"That's about it."

I said I was finished from further conversation, & I
 ended the conversation to a more important subject.

I was never to further knowledge than I knew. Having given
 the readers a wide berth during the week end so that I
 should not become involved with them & killing, I strolled across
 on the Sunday evening with the crowd of a little drink before dinner.
 If the week-end crowd had not swallowed all that Martin
 I would have one. My real paper was - as you may know -
 was otherwise.

It happened to be a fine evening, but the place seemed
 deserted. I saw people were sitting in deck chairs down by the
 river, & one of our original crowd was coming near the bank
 "for a drink". I stood in the porch window of
 the house & found the place empty, & I walked about for
 the first time but better, & a cigarette and still working
 in a slow motion.

I strolled out again & saw a chair not far from the
 window of Howwood's office. The window was open, & I heard
 voices. I sat down on the chair in the chair.

Howwood & I sold a.

I heard Howwood say with throaty urgency - "If you
 could have the hat box, you know, but you are cautious.
 And you know what that is - my dear."

That's a strange method of robbery, I thought. Was the big
 brute so sure of himself?

She was right for the records, & I heard his laugh.

"Once more, what you?"

"I'm the last over to you."

"Then rather rich - what?"

"I'm of opinion, yes."

"Well, if you want the little hatbox - here -"

"Not a bad time."

"Oh, well, please you must find it self. - Where is
 she tucked away at the moment?"

"I think that's my affair."

"Quite so. - Get out a gun. Sit. And have one
 yourself if you feel like it."

I left the ^{chair} seat & strolled across the lawn, & then turned & walked to the ^{front} window ^{so as to make it appear} as though I were making a faint entry. I found her behind the bar, with a gin bottle in one hand & a glass in the other. It made me angry that she should have to leave like this. Her back was turned & I felt that she denied me, & so I supposed her in one of those moments of desolation when courage fails. She put the glass & bottle down on the ledge below the shelves, & put her hands to her face, & pressed back a gasp against a sob as though she felt suddenly faint. Was I needed? I asked myself, & I knew I was, yet I wondered whether my being there would be less than welcome to her - unless -. And then I saw her raise the glass, & drink the sweet spirit, & that too shocked me.

I ~~spoke~~ ^{spoke} to her.

I had not made a sound, but she must have divined some purpose, for she turned & saw me, & I saw again in her eyes. Yes, perhaps more than eyes, for eyes might cover up intention. Her face was flushed & blank.

I made myself smile at her.

"Just strolled down to see if you have any of that Martell left."

She placed the glass & bottle on the bar counter.

"Is there, Mr. Ryan?"

"Why I have one. What will you give me?"

She filled the glass, deliberately & a bottle silence, & I felt challenged by the knowledge that had come to me. So she had a child, & I was beginning to understand.

"Become one a parent."

I knew what her job was, & I pushed on a stool & did not wait for her to wait, to believe that child to Howard. I heard the voice faintly in the distance, & he was persuasive & soothing. He wanted her to drink with him, & I felt my muscles tighten. A short silence rather like a deep drawn breath, & she was back in the bar. I was suddenly of glass, & I did not look at her. She might be angry to be close & contact.

She stood there a faint glow, her hands resting on the counter. She had turned her face, & was head up & vaguely hostile. - but I knew to be treated & regarded

even as a friend? -

"We'll let you pay to drink your little drink?"

She now looked first one at a window, & I seemed to see her eyes fixed upon some other & absent creature. Was it the child, & was I being rebuffed? And was she still angry with me for having done a "that moment of weakness"? I waited by the door, & waited a part of time, again.

That gesture seemed to bring her back to me.

"I don't think I want more."

"Well, - I'll refrain too - if you feel that way. - But I pay, of course."

I felt for my wallet & had a ten dollar note in the center. She looked at it. Please

"I'll do - for other people. But that's back."

On you met for a moment. Then, I looked my glass away, picked up the note & returned it to my wallet.

"Can you now you can wash them off?"

"Quite sure."

And then a man's head appeared at a window.

"Oh, - Bella, can we have two drinks out in the garden?"

"Yes, Mr. Sumner; I'll bring them to you."

She waited until the fellow had gone, & then placed our two drinks on a tray, & gave me a sudden, half-bitten smile. It was - "I told you so. The evening has been a regular & inevitable." I waited to carry our two glasses away into the garden, & I felt that we had now done a mutual abstinence. I had thought would my life be a state of repression to her as a perpetual beggar.

I heard footsteps & a voice.

"Morning, Mr. Byrnes."

I turned & I stood & saw those gleaming blue eyes regarding me curiously.

"What - all alone, & not drink?"

"Drinking & drinking in my room out there."

"What will you have?"

"Nothing - thank."

"Abstinence fellow."

I liked his fascination a little as I liked his suspicious face, & I could read his subtle hostility.

I said - "I can pay for the stool - if you like, Mr. Howard."

He smiled at me.

"I am sure the honor is mine, Mr. Byers. ^{By you for nothing in it} ~~be well shall~~

"Can I stand you something?"

"Thank you, no. I rather prefer cooperation."

I laughed, for I had gazed at the window.

"Well, I'll have a glass of water. What's your name, Mr. Howard?"

He gave me a sudden glance.

"Nothing, thank," he turned & walked out, - but his footsteps ceased in the lounge. I supposed that he had not done this to
 Did he suspect that my glass of water was some camouflage, & that I had other reasons for my visit?

That this glances had indicated me. He was quick enough with his tongue, & I did not like him any the better for that. And he thought me a busy & a play-boy, & was equally sure that I was not a simpleton. I was sitting up a darning, & a situation. I should have been back behind the bar, & I knew that he was innocent unaware of Howards' intention.

"Do you think I could have a glass of water, Mr. Chalkey?"

She looked at me with sudden, caressing intention.

"Of course, Mr. Byers."

She turned for a glass & a jug of water, & filled it for me, & as she placed it on the bar counter she gave me a quick, & quiet, & of no innocent a drink. I nodded at her & smiled. I was giving nothing away to Howard, & I began to talk back & picture to him a chatty & conventional way. She bit back, but rather with an air of playful fiction, for I should imagine such conversational efforts were made in a place such as this. It figured me to picture Howard repeating these hints to me playing the part of the bar.

Then a couple came into the bar, & I glanced at my wrist watch, & got off my stool.

"Good. One must offend one's coach."

I reached the lounge at time to see Howard changing the door of his office, & I chuckled. Playing at fiction I can had not brought him any significant information.

(After Page 74)

After all we are all boys of nature & emotion, even though some
of the boys are of ^{made} will. I have often wondered about women who
take the will. Do they rid themselves of all emotion by a method
of starvation? A happy woman would be for and over a
father to be directed to the right & wholehearted, gloriously
like the river down garden.

That is what I want for the child. Happiness, a new belief in
the essential kindness of certain people.
I shall leave her rich happy like them. Good creature - the
Penguin.

So, we met happily in Abbotsford, i.e. Mr. Dan Mearns, a
happy way of dealing with people & things. Also, there seems to be
a new sort of rebellion in his attitude towards me. He has
reverted to a large playful country, & he does not try the usual
male tricks. - But how can I like him - alive -?
And, of God, in his heart about death?
I shall leave me. What if he knew the whole truth about
me?

And Howard? - I have begun to realize that Howard
would be smart enough to tell me the truth.

Oh - how I need a comrade, someone who could understand
or believe in me, in spite of the past. - I want someone I can
not so rely upon as I want.

And if he could be play the old-fashioned hero, - thank
the world - & wear the mantle? Providence! - By dear, you
really are being rich!

But how I would like to see him think that arrogant brute.
He can fence, & row a row, & I believe he can love.
How he that other stuff - his, the long & summer days
which is the only thing that matters to a woman who she is
in a corner like I am.

By some the relation is obvious. I should check the
job, a just chippiness.

than she had. In the days of the Puritan she might have had to walk abroad with a red A embroidered upon her bosom, & the dear Victorian would have frowned her by well-savory shunts or forbidding frowns. - As for the child - poor little creature - I could remember my father telling me that in a very small boy he had tumbled into a dragon room full of ^{black} rats & vipers, & asked his father a devastating question.

"Father, what is a bar-let?"

What the answer ^{had been} I do not know, but I can imagine the icy atmosphere.

On now the good Victorians really arrived, & I laid off a quiet explosion in the Victorian atmosphere. I have often wondered about their days & ours, in their contrasts, their intelligences & their inhibitions. I must round the corner, a top hat gone, I launch to church. I that - perhaps we are kinder & easier to live with, more tolerant, more graciously paid, & perhaps less ready to damn our neighbors.

Well, that same week I saw a thing that moved me. ~~to the exclusion of company.~~ I happened to be standing at the gallery window which overlooked the road where I saw her come out of the Meadow Gate. I saw her pass & I looked back; she had something white in her hand. A hundred yards or so along the road a red letter box had been hit into a brick pillar. She was hatless, & her haste was only too evident. She went swiftly down the road, & slipped the white thing into the post-box, passed, looked left & right, & then as though the deed done was safely done, strolled back to the white gate at her leisure.

I would have given much to have seen the address upon the that envelope.

On that particular Saturday eve began arriving early. ~~over the way.~~ It was a day of a day, like some "Sunday" a good of formidable matters. I had been well & quite unable to settle down to work. I had tried to book a dinner table at the Meadow ~~but~~ been fobbed off by Howard in person.

"Sorry, Mr. Ryan, we can't enter you for retirement."

So, I had been just Ryan to his, & his attitude towards me was that of the hard-boiled man of the world to a young fellow who was a bit of a fool. I had played him up, & the debtor balance was piled up against him.

" Could'nt you get one out with - a partner? "

He had ~~trunk~~ his big back on me as though to suggest that if I hadnt the guts to get a girl on my own I was even less than a pussy.

Betty joined me up with an early dinner, though most part was
meant to be for conversation, but Betty did not belong to the
cabbage-school. I told Bill that I was taking the key to the
the house not to set up for me. The meeting was well along
full face on the President. The place was all clear, even as
to the point of the country car. There was a bubble from the
bar, & the garden table was crowded with dinner-facets &
pleasant frocks.

It was to be a very much ⁱⁿ a single night, with relays of dinner & dinner, & dancing much as you please. The second night & the garden night cater for those who asked for emotional interludes, & ~~personal~~ ^{personal} journey. The dance-band was turning up in the lounge as I entered, & the leader - a young man with a flat head & an immense webbed monstrosity bobbed a greeting at once. I rather liked those lads who had to make money by making mad music for the crowd. Most of them were ex-R.A.F. pilots who had seen life in the rough, & were finding life tough & rough after the War.

The first view of dinner was very novel. There were a small
dinner-^{table} floor in the dimness, but at the Pasadena you just
knew what you pleased. I can now remember eating a very
luscious ^{lemon} ^{sauce} ^{dressing} ^{and} ^a ^{number} ^{of} ^{saucy} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{frying} ^{to}
the clock-room. I strolled into the bar & it was
crowded. I saw Selda there in a rafter perch, with
a little jumpy fellow who looked like a Maltese terrier
dog. She had been a good one a rough flicker of a
smile. There was motion to sit, & I did not need a
chair, so I went a stand by an open window, & reviewed
the scene. I looked for the Wheatlys & did not see
them & felt rebuked.

Howard came sailing in, wore a chatty, & passing ship
siber with all a Sunday. His powdered cheeks looked redder
than usual, & that I know of from across his powdered way
such a signature there. He saw me & I shall name.

" What about a glass of water, sir?"

"I had you" I said. "I state you had not in the
morning."

The band started up. I had a ^{new} degree of the love.
Coyler now sang this, a two or three vocal action I

the crowded bar. I was watching them when I saw a very large man with a white waistcoat & a pink waisttie. He wore an eye-glass & a black & gold face, & his beard. I don't know why, but I am frightened again. He said he was from the bar, & gave a sign opposite I sold a.

I heard he say - "Come a-pursum Belle,"
She saw him a man-carrying mount of the dead, it
repeated that she was too heavy & that the imitation was
not in order. And the S next ^{intending} gave up the game. He made
a sign to her, an order to explain. The bladder of Lead
was in a partiality against him.

I acted impulsively, with a flash of anger. Why should she be ordered to dance with that fat brute, & I was reminded of our country's "Bitter Sweet." I saw the flag in the back of Bladen's head & I made a dash for it, & I moved quickly from the window to the street door, & I gave

"Will you dance with me, Devin Mallory?"
 "How can you smile after with a scared appeal."
 "I'm afraid - I -"

And then she did a thing which astounded me. She fled, like a yellow flame blown by the wind toward the open French window. I stood there fully shocked and guilty, a scallywag of a fool. None of our fellows saw. I saw a nearby Horwood take her place behind the bars, and a moment or two later Mr Bladder of Land came looming up to me.

"And who is the Butcher Son?"
 "I looked at his unpleasant face with its ^{repulsive} ~~eyes~~ ^{mouth} of glass.
 "By name in Byron, if that is of any use to you."
 "Dear Sam, what. Each should at least score a lady."

I smiled at her, & said gently - "If you would a
show-down, in, you can join me in the garden."
He laughed.

"Hardly worth while - I think."

Howard had come to the end of the bar, a big man

2. If available, - Mr. Rogers, "if you wish it."
I shall see Mr. Rogers.

" I shall, Mr Howard, I don't think that is necessary.

(After 80.)

Another scene in the bar. That pompous old pig Sir Percival
Gamble had been making a fuss at me. A phallus and a ^{little} ~~little~~
spade, & so to be touched to.

Just why did he interfere? To float Howard, or because he
did not like the idea of my dancing with that Sarcasm old
niece?

I'm afraid I put my head. Most certainly he did not like her
or his finger. - I had to find he would like his finger with
Howard. But what would that mean?

He followed me down to the river. There was a gentleman about
him that comforted me, & gave me courage. And he said
some things that were very funny in my mind. It was about
as if he knew.

Oh - hell, am I falling in love with him?

He walked back with me, & we held hands for two
decades.

I feel new courage, got a new fear.

XIII

Sunday - I was at breakfast when Bill brought me a letter ^{which} had been delivered by hand. Bill said that he had heard some one come to the house, & the clack of the letter-box flap, & he had gone to a porch window & seen a fellow in his shirt sleeves walking ^{away} towards the main gate.

I looked at the envelope. The handwriting was fine, & thick, elegant, thick, with ^{two} curved flourishes below my name. It was indeed a portrait, a hint of "Idol's" that, good sir, sit up & take notice." I guessed who that letter had come from. It was surely a black like that shine of hair on his forehead.

I opened it & read.

"Sir
In view of your unalterable belief in to one of my
sacred I must inform you that you are no longer a
member of the club. In the future you will not enter
my gate."

Harold Howard

An ultimatum, & with a fat flourish! Did he think that he would get rid of me so easily, or that I might push a show-down with him? So, the battle was on. I filled myself a second cup of coffee & felt good.

Sam was coming down for lunch, & I was glad of Mr. Sayer's slaughter. He arrived early, & I took him by the arm & stepped him into the studio.

"I want to go with you, Sam. Try out my form."

He grinned at me.

"Got a date with Samson."

"Possibly."

"Who's the cad?"

"Can find out the way."

He took off one coat & put on the glove, & I sat about Sam with gusto. So fast I found no fault & was in such form that I got in a right on the chin, & looked him for the moment. I dropped my hands.

"Sorry, Sam."

He laughed.

"You - are - in form. What's the situation?"

"Cad's blood."

"Sorry for him. if you get going like this. - Put 'em up."

And then, without meaning it, a pulse began. I failed to block the blow. Sam landed a beautiful one on my right eye. It galed my head back & I took one, & instantly he dropped his hands.

"Saw - , saw - " I thought you'd block it."

I blinked at him.

"All right, Sam. I land myself too often. 'Come on.'"

But he kept his hands down.

"Afraid you're going to have a good one. - What about a cold compress?"

"Well, if Sam -"

"Don't do." Distinguished artist for a black eye. Laugh for one morning.

So we took off the gloves, & I reached a handkerchief & cold water. a big clown on the netter with the pad over my eye. Sam appeared, abashedly concerned about it. He hit a puff, but only took a few pulls at it.

~~"Saw, in, could not I identify."~~

"Got her, Sam?"

"Saw the fellow on."

Then I had an idea.

"I have been seeking for the club, Sam, for being tart to an eminent bowler with an eye-glass. Have you ever seen Howard?"

"I have."

"At that Chelsea branch of his?"

Sam nodded.

"Yes, did a bit of a darning there. The club tough tried to put me out."

"And got put out. - I would you'd go across, & the identify the fellow. I'd like to be sure that he is one & the same. Knowledge might be useful."

Sam gave me a dispassionate look.

"You just don't like him as a neighbor."

"Other reason, of last."

He nodded & grinned.

"Right's. I'll stroll over & say I'm interested. Need not say where I've come from."

~~"Don't you go with Sam, & put him down as one from the open road. - I'll come back to lunch."~~

Sam's laughter died as I suggested, why lunch there my right eye was so swollen that I could not see out of it, &

I guessed that it was going to be well a few black. I was provoked by the suggestion that if I showed myself and General Dan Howard would conclude that I was a black. And what of Soulda? Would a black eye command me to be?

Cluck was to be at 1.30. Jimmy had brought a contribution, - a real live one, I suppose, for he had a genuine for collecting such places. I often wondered whether his look - gave entitled and offering to stay the his business, and - but modestly forbids. My eye needed no explaining either to Bill or Betty, - I got two minutes ready in the garden home, & waited for Jimmy's return.

He arrived, looking rather like a ball-timer who had been administering a lesson in manners to some sort of a dog. He had his fists in his trouser pockets. It was obvious that Nanny had pleased him.

"Any luck, Sam?"

"So-so. - It's the same fellow all right. And I think he recognized me."

"Rude?"

"A thug, a blustering sort of beast, a political hanger, if you know what I mean."

"Very well. So you weren't engaged."

"I was not. - Quite shy & mighty about it - until I mentioned Nanny to him."

"You didn't say you were here."

"Rather not. - He asked me to offer me a drink, the big black dog."

"So you think I could dog him?"

"Once in the park & he'd blow up. - But how's the eye?"

"Rather like a punched eye."

"I'm sorry. You ought to have blacked it or dropped it."

"All in the name of adventure, Jimmy. There's your drink."

A black eye is very much a black eye, & though you may talk of walking into gates - parts in the dark, the least cynical of mortals will not believe you. It was about two o'clock I was of that adventure, about like a girl who has developed a herpes on her lip the day before she is to meet her chosen lad. I had gone to show that I possessed more manly than I had allowed for. I kept to the room for a day or two, & actually did see much of a fantastic life which I had put aside when the mood had faded in me, but I was rather a could not forget how her finger had clung to mine.

That a black eye might prove to be a badge of honor had not occurred to me. I was out early in my ship, and had gone up the river. Scully back down a stream, I took an easy path above "The Meadows", a bit ^{my boat} ~~up~~ drift. I was just close to the Meadows bank, & then I saw the river that I saw willow.

I made my way back at her but no more came back to me. She looked at me in a queer, considering way, yet almost flinchingly as though my voice were suggested some more sinister thing. I backed water & held the ship opposite the willow.

I said - "I suppose you know that my membership has been ~~cancelled~~ ^{cancelled} ~~withdrewn~~."

She nodded, & it seemed to me that she saw nothing but that damned ~~expression~~ ^{expression}. I lay back.

"You, I got the boxing with a friend, the famous Jimmy Slaughter," I don't whether she had ever heard of James Slaughter, but her face softened. One can try to put into words certain subtle facial changes, & mine was such just one. There can be a liquid warmth in the eye, a melting of the mouth, another partly concealed & yet manifestly like the light on water.

"I was rather afraid it was my fault."

I do I understand. She had thought that Howard might have beaten me up after that affair with the Monks.

"No, just a friendly punch. - I don't suppose you have ever heard of 'James Slaughter'?"

"No."

"Well, you don't read the sports page in 'The Courier'. Jimmy is pretty famous. He came down now & again, & was put on the show. It's a hobby of mine."

I became aware of her eyes regarding me as man, man in his complexion of white & tanned skin. It sent a queer shiver of self-exaltation through me. Did she see me as a man might wish to be seen by woman & by a particular woman, a clear, strong, fighting creature who could be trusted to defend what was his? The only light was behind her, & he had seemed to glow.

"I'm glad."

Had she been glad of it? That I was strong & handsome & fit & clean to her, & not like the candle ends ^{there}. And then I saw her in the white porch, eyes a little wide, her tanned face glowing. She must have been moved for she turned her head & saw him. The way her face had turned toward me.

I said - "I wonder, if you ever have any trouble ~~like~~, send for me."

He gave right down been hit up of the hour. She stood for a moment looking at me with more color in her cheeks, & her eyes were dewy.

"I can manage."

"By dear" said I - "you can trust me. Good-bye - I am no want, but I don't belong to that sort. - I mean what I said & do."

"I thank you."

She gave me a look such as I had never had from her before. Head bent she moved away along the bank with a deliberate & easy gait. She could walk as beautifully as she could dance. I had a last glimpse of her profile, & her long, little figure, & the curve of her breast. I should have said that just as she had gone out of her & that she went again in my life some mysterious - care free child.

I turned to look at Howard. He was ^{up} there watching us, & I backed my boat a little closer to the bank. Would he walk down & interrupt us? And if he did & played the bully I knew that I should go up where a boat the life out of him. But when he did move it was in my direction. He came slowly down the slope like some urgent, ^{morning} messenger, bent, tall.

"Morning, Mr. Byron."

I saw a smudge spread across his face. He had become alive to my black eye.

"Morning" said I.

I watched him hesitate then as I would have watched the eye of a horse.

"You seem interested in the row."

"I am."

"Had a little trouble rowing, I'm afraid."

"Just a friendly scuffle. - By the way, - I am not accepting that notice of yours."

"Is that so? Well, Mr. Byron, if you say the same - you & the eye might suffer."

I put my head back & laughed, for the man in me was full of love & laughter.

"Thank you for the hint, Howard. I may accept the invitation. It will depend on other things. Good morning."

But I don't say really - I don't know, & I am afraid of really ^{come} full of nonsense. But did people ever before & full, & I ought to not make a case of my sitting &

fouled the bank. He stood there watching me, & I rubbed my
 thigh a stye in a scuffle into him, & wondered if he might
 suspect that I was a bit with my feet.

But my laughter had been for Howwood, & not for him, for
 his own red hair would in the next minute show. Just how
 much did he mean to that fatal heart? Was he no more
 than a colossal decay for his most of least crowd, or was
 he more? I wished that a man like Howwood would stop
 at nothing, & that my own & Caparno was man about as the
 world's flow. It has been said that no man is without
 some quality of goodness, & that the ^{complete} villain is more
 melodramatic, but where Howwood kept a much greater must have
 been in his boots. Shakespeare - I say, never to be quoted
 that great heart - had given us ^{some} complete a magnificent
 example, & I was inclined to agree with him. So the much
 more I am, Dick a Harry wale of our the human person are close
 & a scabbed head-on-down clutter. "Decent" describes the
 modern hero, & was the blackened is regarded as a tame
 sort of mountebank who might be dealt with quite kindly
 on the F. hills.

How much the "Grand Man" was surface - I cannot
 say. I only had it that the great villain was wedded to a
 show, & his Galilei & Dardemans may have been creative
 contrasts. One may be moved by a woman's baron, his
 mouth, his hair, his eyes, but I think it is the complete
 portrait not that masterpiece to make more sensitive
 spiritual self. Had I been an old gentleman with a
 love story I think it would have told itself somewhat like
 this dream of mine, save that the old gentleman could not
 have commanded the final punch. Staged long the old
 home of mine seemed to contain both me & some
 ultimate human wisdom, a wisdom which it fermented of feeling
 about this. Huntfield must have known well as well
 as good, but to be its mind self was gentle & benign
 & reasoning.

One will but fully at some house. No touching with
 for you in this, but & they have no dark corner where suspicion
 lurks. Maybe the old home of mine spoke to me in the
 middle of the night.

"Life is mostly without good faith. Just a game shall be the lot."
John, that was my problem, to gain his trust completely - without
smile. His faith in life & love had been shattered, & my job
was to restore it. And he too had reason to defend against
the deception & revolt.
I found myself wondering about his child.

I was out early for a little clean air & some peace when I saw him coming up the river in his skiff. How odd! What a pretty sight it was, full of strength & grace. I sat out by one of the willows & watched, & there was excitement in me. And then he drew back & now and then stopped the boat, & eyed it down to the bank. His smile was a spirit given.

One of his eyes was black & sparkling.

I held my breath.

He laughed.

"No, quite a legitimate casualty. I was being jostled with a friend, & it just happened."

"It must have hurt."

"Not much. - Have you ever heard of Jimmy Skaggs?"

I had not.

"Is that the name of your friend?"

"Yes. Pretty famous fellow in the ring. Slight heavy weight champion."

"Do you box with champions?"

"Oh happiness. He could knock my head off if he wanted to."

I smiled at him.

"I'm happy for you."

His smile gave me back not my heart going further. He had edged the boat into the bank.

"Soldier - that's exactly I want to say - Ping Pong."

"Can I stop you?"

"If ever you have trouble over there - send for me."

Trouble! I felt dumb, rather helpless.

"Peace."

I nodded at him, & fled, but half way up the lawn I turned & waved to him & he waved back.

Oh, of clean soul, does a black eye make a man love a man.

" Poor Quality
" The Doctor:
Stoke Newington
Surrey."

How delighted I was to try a paper that letter, read it, & reveal again the glow of the envelope, but I might have made a meal of it. Inasmuch I had other feelings about it that were suffused with heart exultation. I had a chin, an Archimedes' third which right led me to reality. was not so modern in my outlook that I could have felt one qualm about propriety in her privacy. I did would have been a Howard Boston, a a figure of the old saying, every thing is not fair in love & war. It had just become anything is allowed to the ingenious devil in ^{modern} times that humanity was far from itself in such a cathartic scene.

My first impulse was to report the letter & the pillow-bone down the lane, but I changed my mind about it. I would deliver it in person, & not let it reach him safely, so I strolled across to The Meadows, & ran steps into Howard at the front door. The letter was in my pocket, & I had no intention of passing it to him. He bowed me good

He bowed my way
"Jefferson, Mr. Ryan."
I was in a good mood - I smiled at him.
"Yes, it's nice, I suppose I am."

" I right accept an apology."

" For what?"

" I don't think you are quite such a facile fool, Dan Bryan."

He made no more, - I looked h'm' the eye.

" As a matter of fact I have a letter for Miss Phelley. It was delivered to me by mistake."

" You can hand it to me, Dan Bryan."

" I prefer to deliver it in person."

He did not budge, & still look' h'm' the face I put out a hand & rang the bell. Was the explanation inevitable? He looked there close to me, & I was ready for you how, if it had arrived, my muscles tense, & my heart beating hard in fact. I was taller than he was, & so close were we to each other that the reddish redness of his skin & a certain gleam about his eyes filled me with a kind of shabby name. Did this tiny old man mean that he could either fight or cow me?

One of his dog's whiskers came shuffling across the hall, & Howard turned.

" Tell Miss Phelley she is wanted."

He found me again, & I put my hands in my trouser pockets, & looked apart one of the pillars. His large, friendly face was engaging, but I began to suppose that there would be no explanation. He was a sunny brute, & his intention was to suppress the interview, & perhaps get a glimpse of that letter. Still I saw I should be wrong the longer, & I thought and nodded at him.

It was he who spoke, as though flying the master of ceremonies.

" Oh, - Bella, Dan Bryan has a letter for you."

Then he looked at me & held out a hand. I smiled straight into his eye. I was feeling very now, & I kept my hands in my pockets. I ignored that hand of his, & drew back a step or two.

" Miss Phelley, if you will come out into the garden - I will explain."

He gave me an eye glass. I was out-manning him, & he knew it. For a moment he hesitated, & then stood aside a bit for me. I was watching his face, & he slipped past him about like a child who half feared that some savage power might catch him. I think it was the first time that I had seen the frightened child in him, & it moved me to great gentleness.

I said - "Let's go down to the river for a minute or two."

He looked surprised as she placed at me. I wanted to put my arm round her - but Howwood was there watching us. The golden chairs were empty, & I made for the weeping willow, not far from the summer house, & I was aware of her keeping her distance. Not till we reached the bank did I pull the letter out of my pocket.

"Left with us by mistake. - Perhaps you would like to read it down here - if please."

She took the letter from me, & placed it at her breast, & sat down on the river bank. I turned & strolled away a few yards, & looked up at the house. Howwood was leaning against one of the white pillars of the porch, & watching us, & it occurred to me that he might be a moment to clear that letter or take it from her by force. Well, - I could counter that. I turned back, & strolled a yard or two away from her. The letter was lying in her lap, & she was staring wide-eyed at the water.

"I hold it."

I saw her head turn quickly. About she looked down at it.

"Yes."

"If I make a suggestion, of course, will it hurt you?"

"I don't know."

"Why not turn it up & give the piece to the river."

I met her eye for a moment, & looking. Then I saw her pick up the letter & envelope, & tear them deliberately into pieces. She stood up, went close to the ^{river} water, & scattered those white fragments on the water. We both watched them float away, & ~~in silence~~ ^{we were silent}.

Then she turned. It seemed to me that the colour had come back into her face, & that her eyes were full of what I should call amazement. She was ^{quite} silent for a second or two, watching the pieces of white paper drift ^{down stream}. Then she drew a deep breath, & spoke, but without looking at me.

"Thank you. - I think I will go back now."

I saw Howwood change his position as we walked up the grass slope. He stood between the two white pillars, his legs stretched, his turning about, & I was reminded of that high cold Henry the Eighth. But ~~nothing~~ I wanted to put a protective arm about I hold. The idea of her having to reveal that heart home revolted me, & more than that. I think - for the first time - I was afraid. I placed at her quietly.

"Feeling all right, my dear."

She smiled, - her smile surprised me. She was dead in air, & suddenly became a person.

"Yes. - I am doing flowers. - It's rather useful."

But you know ^{now} was an ^{old} friend as we reached the porch. I was going to see her in, & more than that. I was waiting for her to come & break that morning's silence, & I had one of those things to say to her. And more he did, & let her pass, & he was not a man & not a woman.

With the chaplain, - The Byrnes.

That gave me the very ^{thing} of ^{what} I needed. I looked in the face, & no man could have missed my meaning.

"Pam Mallory & I happen to be - friends," Mr. Howard. I would like you to remember it."

"Written, my dear son?"

"There are some things some men never understand. Shall we leave it at that?"

I waited a moment for the possible reaction, - but all I got from her was a kind of silly chuckle.

I might have gone on a paper chase & collected some of those fragments which were floating down stream, but the river chose to play on me a strange trick, perhaps because the River God had not found me ready. When I went into the boat I was not moving to get the stuff out. I saw a piece of paper floating beside the boat. I bent down & picked it up, & the writing was quite legible. I recognized it at once as being part of that letter which had come to her from Cornwall. I read it.

"Pity is -"

So, the vagaries of the river flow had brought me a little label with the child's name upon it. Pity. I could draw no other conclusion. I turned it over & got just two words - "The chicken". & I could not help laughing. "Indeed? So the chicken lays well? And what was Pity? Also - well? I had that piece of paper on a shelf where it could dry, got into the kitchen & slipped the bundle into the rowlock, got aboard & parked out.

Inevitably I recalled up stream. I will admit that I had had a rather night, worrying about her & it had taken me a couple of hours to find sleep. I was becoming quite

getting about her being that home with her. A woman's desire may
 lead up to a point, but if - . Yes, I'll confess I could not
 put that heartiness into words, but just felt as though mother must
 have something of interest. I cheerfully with the home, a look
 an easy, & then I saw her at that upper window. I moved
 to her, & she moved back, & surely seemed to come back into
 of world.

I saw the boat along at a long paddle, for I felt my
 slipping into one of those dreamy moods when the creature myself
 action within. I knew the place so well. So was liked
 by much at night in the soft darkness, but I was being with,
 & then - in a flash - saw idea would manifest, a picture in my
 eye, something that demanded expression in form & colour. One
 of my literary friends has told me that the same thing happens
 with women. And he had laughed. "A hot bath - in my
 case - seems to stimulate imagination, & sometimes I get the
 idea when ^{showing}." Well, I had that feeling as I scalded
 off steam, that something was really inside me, & that I had
 only to wait for it to emerge.

I recalled her for as Wisbech Wood, where the great trees,
 oak & beech, had walked down to the house as though to
 mark their feet in it as to drink. I lay on my back &
 looked into the great green gloom of that magical wood.
 It seemed as old as Time, & yet it could happen here. A
 man with a long bow might have emerged in Lincoln
 green, or some Roman legionary a farmer who had lost his
 way & had a that that needed guidance. I just sat &
 stared, & suddenly the vision came to me.

I would go down to St. Mary's & down to Peter. It
 should not be difficult in that small place. I would make
 friends with the child, & though the child I might come
 closer to the mother.

Finally, that bright-eyed America, was a pair of mini-
 ke kept their two charming white teeth in the water part.
 I would go back & ring him up, & see if he could
 have one for a day or two.

The Abbotsbury Exchange is not the most prettiest &
 expensive of places, but the young woman I scalded did put
 me in touch with the Ship's Parlor at St. Mary's.

asked for Mr. Mansley, & was told by the office that he was not in the hotel. Well, was Mr. Mansley available?

"Who is speaking?" asked the voice.

"Mr. Robert Byron - from Sney."

"Hold on a moment, Mr. Byron."

I waited, & then I heard the pleasant voice of Mansley's young Polish wife. She was a most kind & charming creature, with a small child of her own, & somehow her voice reminded me of Sroldan.

"Hello, - Mr. Byron."

"Hello, - Mr. Mansley - I think? - Good. - I am waiting down west & I wonder if you had could put me up for a few days."

"Oh, Mr. Byron - we are full."

"No chance at all. - It's better urgent."

"Just a moment. - I'll speak to Miss Hanthly. Hold on."

"I waited a not for long."

"Are you there, Mr. Byron?"

"Yes."

"Could you be satisfied with a room - out?"

"Quite."

"I'm one of the cottages. - You could take your meals with us."

"Thank you - greatly, Mr. Mansley."

"What day?"

"Well, it's not, - this is Wednesday. I could be with you on Friday."

"Shall you want a car from Town?"

"No, - I'll drive down. - I have been very' companion. It will be splendid to see you both."

"I'll - till Friday, Mr. Byron."

"I'll Friday, & that you soon so much."

(After Page 93)

Shall I ever forget the morning he brought that letter to the Meadows?

Of course the Bent - that's how I think of him now - had tried to get hold of it, - but he seemed to dominate Howwood. The tenth bluff did not work.

I am sure on the letter. He went a rat by the river, & while I read the letter he left me alone, but all the time I was wondering whether the letter had any particular meaning for him. If he had played the card & pretended that he had opened it by mistake, he would have found out about Data. And what then?

Then he said something which surprised me. He had slipped back at the house, & I slipped too. The Bent was standing there in the porch.

" Why not tear it up & give it to the river? "

I looked at him, but he was gazing at the meadow across the way. I saw the same suggestion of gentle restraint, generous
was' confidence. He might have known what that letter meant to me.

I did not say anything. I just tore it up, & scattered the pieces in the water. He put out a hand & I held it for a moment.

He went back to the house. The Bent blocked the way. He was looking dangerous, but again my Da dominated him. I stopped in, - but I waited the longer to listen.

I shall never forget what he said to Howwood, & he said it so gently. You have been wrong, Mr Bent.

Oh - yes & dead.

clothes had returned. She was dead up, & she seemed to approve me. I suppose that many women whose opinions of the weather may have not been too happy, but suppose from flattery, perhaps towards some particular man. There was a girl, perhaps - who some provincial institution possessed her, & she might have been a woman or a man. But she suddenly wrote & told me. Had she been that twice about that mid-winter letter, & my mother? - I was to discuss the days to come just as she was feeling better & more of me.

"I said - " I shall be away for a few days, - I wanted to tell you that - "

And then I ditched, for - about she looked at me as she had looked at me on that wet day in June.

"Yes - "

That was a challenge. It was like one of Angel's threats, on a straight right from Jimmy Slaughter, & somehow I could not forget it.

I made myself smile at her.

"Sorry - " Am I being - presumptuous? "

She smiled towards the gate.

"Perhaps - but, - well - I am concerned so much."

She did not look at me again, nor did I attempt to follow her. Damn it, - had I ever met a woman who could be more difficult & ineluctable? I had begun to believe that she had chosen to class me with the "Midwest" crowd, & that I had some solid meaning for her as man. I stalked back to Huntfield, feeling a little exasperated, & then my bitter mood passed. Maybe some more subtle confidence came to me. Could any ^{creature} ~~creature~~ which have made me feel as I felt about her? And she had had much to bear, poor dear, & still had much to bear.

I suppose - like many creatures whose craft comes to them with a kind of graceless ease - I was a somewhat facile soul & not a subject for self-analysis, nor in doubt the integrity of the workings of the human psyche. Healthy in a healthy 'do', & there was no symptom & forced corner in my self, or so I believed. I found life good & the expression of it somewhat good. I suppose a psycho-analyst could have unravelled me about my mind self, & the better whims of women. Maybe she is much more defensible & more

valuable than man, & that the plan of the man might
require for change of plan.

Was I to take up the adventure? - No, I would not. My
car was ready & I would go in that stage coat that had
flavor of romance for me. I was sitting in the old parlor,
with the light fading, & the color melting out of the fabric
the about time. All was brown or grey, a little would that
would find a soft summer in sleep. My mood was whimsical
& sad, & perhaps for the first time in my life - I was curious
of Lachin. She, I heard I faint sound of footsteps savored
outside the door, a sound that came about like a
suspense of sleep, or the stillness of the night. No bell
rang, & yet I feared ^{that} I heard yet another sound.

I got up & went out into the hall. It was very dark
there, but I could distinguish something white by the oak
floor. A letter. It had floated like a leaf & came
to rest beyond the mat. I bent down & picked it up, &
carried it into the parlor, & turned on the light. There was no
name on the envelope.

I slit it open, drew out & read a sheet & read.

"I forgive me. -"

Yes, just that!

Indeed, I had a long climb before me, & I was away by
seven, with the sun at my back & the road utterly empty.
Bill had revised the car to 20. H. P. Rover. She was old
but she was fast, & now had I had any trouble with her, &
I always thought of her as a young car, which, as to mileage, she
was. I had a spare tire & petrol in the locker, & a word
of comfort in my wallet, & all I needed was a ray of
light though I would call my mileage more actual. What a
fantastic adventure was this, the quest of the illegitimate child
of the woman who expressed for me - faintly.

I was ready for Baryatole & Andawanda. I got through
most of the shopping center before what I called the Powder-
House. She was now running well, & seemed to be as much for
the adventure as I was. I pushed her along at fifty on
the open road, & met very little traffic, & I was feeling good
with these two words of her saying to me.

It was somewhere near Stanchley that I struck a hill, chipping
to climb half way up it, & on down near the top when a

flurry of brown water gushed out ^{round} of the radiator cap. I pulled up, got out put my hand to the cap a second, for the top was too hot to be touched. She was boiling.

I said - "Well, you are a beauty to play such a trick on a day like this."

I let her cool down, & then eased her along till I came to a lonely cottage. A woman gave me a can of water, & I filled the car up, & drove on more slowly. But she was in a will. About the night I had been jolting at the journey & trying to persuade me to abandon it. She began to ^{again} to ~~run~~ ^{run} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~reporting~~ ^{reporting} more rusty water from her radiator, & I began to realize that I had no chance of making St. Mary's in a day, ^{so} I decided to break the journey at Tarent, & phone the Mackleys, & tell them I should now be delayed. He did reach Tarent late in the afternoon. "The Cattle" could put me up, & I left my luggage & drove the car to a garage.

An overworked & rather cross ~~man~~ ^{man} ~~handed~~ ^{handed} to my trouble. He said that the engine might need adjusting, & he would have a look at the carburettor & valve timing, & fill her up with clean water. I was not wholly reassured, but hopeful, that I had begun to suspect that it was not the car's fault. Her cooling system might be mixed up, for she had been packed up during the war.

I shall always laugh - a little sardonically - over a piece of foresight that saved the situation. The car was delivered to the mill owner, plus the bill, & an assurance that all was well. I often wonder whether they did anything to the machine. ~~car~~. I happened to stroll into The Cattle yard, & I saw an empty glass bottle in a corner. I collected that bottle, filled it at a tap, & stored it away well corked in the locker.

How I was to bless that bottle! I have kept it as a faithful memento of that devil's drive. I had not covered twenty miles before she began to vomit, & in a lonely stretch of road. I let her cool, & then emptied the contents of the bottle into her. It occurred to me that I had better refill that bottle, & after turning around, I found a small pail half full of very dirty water. Well, the lady would have to be satisfied with a very dirty drink.

And what a day of it I had, with the damned radiator vomiting at the top of every considerable hill, & I - sowing around with that bottle, on stops at cottages or farms. I dared not push her beyond twenty miles a hour. I spent the day

well as you glad to be damned more. But I reached St. Louis
in the evening, having eluded the ferry, & taken the more round-about
way. I was tired & unrefreshed.

I had not been out of the car three minutes before the biggest ~~dream~~ ^{dream} ~~happen~~ of this little Cornish place had happened to me. My baggage had been carried off by a band of robbers, who planned to send the car to the local garage & tell the whole town the whole story. I felt I did not want to see the car again for at least a week. The tide was in, the water very blue & black, & the great hills green & glowing. Boats had moved anywhere. I strolled to the end of the harbor, & looked at the parade of little houses, so intimate & individual & right, with their gardens glowing & the green fall of the evening sunlight. What a picture the place was, a sudden peace came to me.

Then I saw Morley in the steps of the "Ship & Cattle," a friendly & familiar figure against the white wall. He had spotted me & he waved, & came to meet me. I remembered how the first time I had met him, I had held him, his bright eyes in his American vicinity.

Yes - I have it put you out, Prudely.

" I see people there that are out. - Don't happen."

"My daughter can look to winter."

He replied.

"Don't cheat. - Your room is all ready. It's just up the hill behind."

"Great! - I could do with a drink."

"Come along into the bar."

I had a drink, a thin dinner, a what a dinner in those
deserted days! The chef was a Pole, & the waiter a Slavonian. I
ordered half a bottle of oldish Chateau Lafite, & the
Cameron of it all ^{for} ~~for~~ me. I had a table in the big
dining room, & the place was like the poop of a ship, with all
the colour of sea & sky & hills so near & so unobscured.

Mr. St. Pierre was not at the time of the day,
for the train ⁱⁿ had departed, & no fat woman with
flat face & washed purple lips marched about saying at
length that was not British or Birmingham.

I stood at coffee, evidently fresh to coffee, on the big balcony above the dining room, & finally joined me. I sat at table. We had the place to ourselves, for most of the residents had gone up for an evening. I still recall that St. Francis was a

not more peaceful Middleland. The land-locked water, & Falmouth Roads & the dark green hills were extraordinarily brilliant, & what reveal a thin suggestion of romance. I remembered that I was in the land of Istar & Irem.

I said - "You chose pretty well, Thursday."

But he knew you was here.

"Sure - I did, - but choosing isn't my thing, the worst enemy of you. And you are trying to tackle problems with one hand tied behind your back."

"You, living by regulation. - It can't be pretty excepting to a man from our garden."

He hit up as though the scene before us was significant.

"Let's forget it."

"You" said I - "there is virtue in forgetting, someone has a meal tied up with string. And that sea is free to all. Fiddlers & your labourers know nothing of reality."

He chuckled.

"And - hotelier! - If you had a smelt of my god, Ryan, you might see wild blue & mad Thurman."

"I don't say I should."

But I was tired & ready for sleep in bed, & the left porter who was still on duty asked if my guide. He took the steps down between my two little doors & the light, & climbed. We were in the shadow, but as we climbed we came into the slaty light of the valley room. I saw two white cottages with little gardens in front of them, very little places. The ~~most~~ ^{nearest} one was mine.

"You, sir."

He chuckled, & a pleasant old body opened the door.

I raised my hat to him.

"I'm afraid I'm rather late."

"You don't look ready, sir."

The room was upstairs & at the back, simple & clean, with a window looking east. I put my suitcase on the bed, & was opening it when I heard a woman's voice coming from the garden next door.

"Peter, - my pet, - time for bed."

I went to the window & saw a small girl with long coloured hair running up the path.

"Well - I'm damned!" thought I - "are they going to be so easy?"

XVI 4

It ^{it to be} had was more comfortable than I had expected, & I lay relaxed, with my back under my head, & washed. But a ~~strange~~ ^{strange} thing of conscience had brought me to the Carmel college! Waiting for a train at a station, Hawthorne's development of "The Ancestral Footstep" a misdeed letter, a piece of thin paper drifting into my boat-house. ~~with that one word "Peter" upon it.~~ And had I not sent down to the child. In fact the child might be in the room ^{conspicuous} ~~conspicuous~~ to ^{and down} ~~down~~ with nothing but a thin wall between us. It did not occur to me that St. Mary might contain two Peters. The conscience was too convincing.

After that devil of a dream, & Pamela's dream & the good night I slept the sleep of the ignorant, for I have always suspected that the night ^{are} ~~is~~ lighter & deeper than the dream. I have very often been excited & awake, but it failed to keep me awake, though I woke with it very much active & in my next morning.

Only a light in the blind, & the antique little room very peaceful. I heard the creak of the stairs, & a gentle knock at the door.

"Good morning, water, sir."

"Thank you."

"Would you like a cup of tea, sir?"

"I should - very much so - but at this hour?"

"I can manage, sir."

She brought a cup of tea, & a gentle manner! How simple & reassuring. I had a feeling that the day was going to be good.

My first contact with the child was to be immediate & reassuring. Breakfast at the Ship's Castle. I opened the college door, & saw a small girl leaning on the next door gate. She was in a blue frock, & her hair was long, & her little legs well browned. Her back was turned to me.

I said - "Good morning, Peter."

She turned about I saw a little, freckled face, a pleasant little face. Her eyes were hazel like her mother's, deep & strongly freckled. I don't think I had ever seen a more fresh & attractive little face, with its slightly retreating nose & its mischievous freckles. She looked at me & smiled for a moment & then broke into a smile.

"Good morning, water."

"Peter!"

"How do you know I'm Rita?"

"I heard someone call you Rita."

She stood looking at me with the eager caution of some small girl, & the uncertainty that was in her face had a small dignity of her own which I found very attractive.

"What is your name?"

"Robert. I am just going down to the hotel for my breakfast."

"I've had mine. - What are you doing here?"

"Having a holiday."

And then the door opened, & a little dark woman appeared. She was one of those women who manage to combine a plump carriage with a boyish vitality & her eyes were kind.

"I said: 'Rita & I have been having a drink.'"

She gave me an approving look which became friendly.

"Rita - but of course, no."

"But she's pretty, isn't she Rita?"

The child was looking up at me with little twinkling eyes.

"So another day. - I think I am."

I & Mrs. Russell & I exchanged laughing looks.

"Is she - your, madam?"

I saw the woman's face go crimson & red.

"No, no; she just shows with me. I lost my car and."

"I'm sorry. - Well, Rita, I must have my breakfast, he'll see each other again."

I waved my hat to her grandson, & passed out a down the steep, little street, & reaching I heard the child's voice.

"Good-bye, Mr. Robert."

I turned & waved to her, & saw her hold the children's woman's hand.

The dining-room of the "Ship & Car" was ^{fairly} full, but my table was waiters' faced near the windows at a corner table at the back of the room, & turned to greet them. Her wife, with her comely face & clenching hair, was as pleasant to behold as the woman's own.

"Good-morning, Roger. How are the bed."

"Good all though I don't like the counter egg."

"My wife was sure that you would be comfortable there."

"Thank you, Mrs. Murely. Old backbenches can be very people."

She gave me that half smile of hers.

"Are you. - Mr. Roger."

"No need - thank."

As I walked to my table I was conscious of being observed. Robert Roger the parting part. So my own displeased when the world shows interest in him?

"Let's call it being cynical. That of these people are good people, if a little colder. If you feel into the heat a cold at night, that chap would take a risk & try to pull you out."

I nodded at him.

"True, sir. - One found that out in the war. - I suppose they are enjoying being - it."

"But are they, Mr. Byrnes?"

"Well, no, not some."

"Just what they are suffering from, like a dentist weary a topper for the first time, & feeling a bit shaky is it?"

I laughed. I was to be lucky in my neighbors. I came to discover that Sir Stephen Grafton had spent many years as an administrator in the East & had returned to a small villa in Surrey, & had become the inevitable work-up. They owned a little old car which his wife drove, & I was to be impressed by the mental humor & dignity of this somewhat distinguished man.

I was reaching my own car, & when I had filled a pipe I strolled along to the garage & made contact with my friend Joe. He had a flash for cars & the airbrush, & physically he might have been Lord Camille's younger brother, & the exchanging they was that they shared the same birthday. Joe was busy in the River, dimly the racket, & the ground at me.

"Hallo, sir."

"I found the trouble, Joe?"

"She's sorted up. No wonder you had a day of it."

"Can you put her right?"

"It will take a day or two, sir. - I shall have to fill her up with sort-removal."

"Well, I'll leave her to you, Joe. How's the family?"

"Fine, sir."

I went & sat in the rear-wall, smoked my pipe & watched life. One or two of the loach recognized me, & came & chattered. I liked these Cornish ones of the sea. If you gave them nothing you got a natural courtesy in return. There seemed to be no spite or class-consciousness in them. They had their sea.

I was talking to ^{Peter} Piggelly who owned a motor-launch, & had often taken me to St. Ives, or up the Fal, or across to the Helford River. His pipe was empty, & I offered him a fill. He was Captain of the Cornish, and a dear, & best of all, you were not to be shy, & I could have pictured him readily with Tintin & Snobles in the days of ^{St. Ives} St. Ives. He was one of his noble moods, & I wondered why, for he & I had always

- " Sweet retina, I guess, no."
- " Sweet to the sweet, Peter. - Sweet had won my sweet cognate.
Is she a niece of yours?"
- " I was a little ahead of that distant question, & I saw his eye
dash."
- " No, - Mr. Pagan. But she was. - She's got a mother working
somewhere near Chelva."
- " You are bad of father's parents."
- " He snickered."
- " What's the other name, Peter?"
- " Mallory, no."
- And suddenly he grew reticent, & about ²⁰ 5 minutes I
asked no more questions.

Yes, a nice discretion was needed even in my approach to the
child. I did not want the Papally to suspect that Peter was
my whole reason for being in St. Martin, & to make the visit appear
more natural I had brought some painting gear with me.
I was a little more of cut-throat than I, & I walked off to the cattle
& lay on the grass & let myself believe almost before I was
asleep. I don't know how the idea came to me. Does one
know how ideas come, or since then one can explain how the
dead & vivid images come that one has never seen
manifest in dreams. I was lying there with the sun a star at
the sky when a voice said to me - "Paint the child's
portrait."

So challenging the suggestion that I set up like one who
has been startled into wakefulness. Paint his portrait? And take
it back with me? And to what altar should I give up that
picture of a small girl now? I had no notion at the moment,
beyond the idea that had come so suddenly into my
head.

I collected my retina book & paid a visit to the shop above
the quay which was St. Martin's John Barber or Harmer, & like any
shop of its kind it wanted had more to offer than the
Ladder Store. It offered me a mugged fruit ^{bag} ^{bag}, & Parham's
Butter Dye. I chose the Parham's product & took my mother
retina, & slipped the bag into my pocket.

It was during the change-over when a few extra-couches
were parked on the quay, & the "St. Martin" had spelled out
another habit at our feet. Curious - how the English - who you

hilarity - appear to find other places & other people ludicrous & small-minded. I sat two old acquaintances outside the shop, & I will admit that they were somewhat ungracious in their decor, the more so perhaps because both were white-headed. They had their first relation with them, & as we chatted by the sea wall, & the passing traffic gave an incessant din, I realized how much more cheerful was the dog. He sat quietly on his haunches, & ignored the crowd. It did not seem to elicit for him.

"Long acquaintance, Don Bryan?"

"I have hardly a mind!"

The old gullman was dead in an'. He had a fierce & fiery face, & he made one think of Sahar's Cavan capacity for Egyptian meat. Two loaves & two eggs later had just passed out, & they stood to stare & giggle.

"The dear woman" said S. - "I don't seem to recall there for this woman."

He'll send me, & become suddenly vocal & inquisitive.

"He's wiser, we are."

She had had a handsome voice, & I patted the dog's head, & smiled at adjacent youth.

"But he's rich, of land."

I have always found that formula remarkably successful & effective.

I knocked at the Pagelly door, with the bag of sweets in my other hand, & it was the child who opened the door to me.

"Hello, Rita. - I love your sweets here."

She gave me a captivated, upward smile.

"Do you like sweets?"

"Did she like sweets!" I opened the bag, & she dipped her finger into it.

"Thank you, Mr Robert."

"You can have the bag, Rita."

"I can't be greedy, must I?"

Well, well, out of the mouth of babes & sucklings! - I soon began to realize that she was the daughter of her mother, & her small, dimpled, clean little face made me understand Peter Pagelly's affection for her. This small girl had manner & dignity, & knowing her after the New Model down there by the garage. I saw, Mr Pagelly appeared with her hands smoothed in flour, & I made my request to her.

"I have brought Rita my sweet notice, Mr Pagelly."

"How kind of you, sir."

"I have a favour to ask - You know I paint pictures."

"We all know that, sir."

"I would like to paint Rita's portrait. Any objection?"

"No, no, sir. - She loves me."

He then looked at the child who was obviously well sweet.

"What do you think of that, Rita? You'll be quite generous."

Her little, puckered face seemed to answer.

"Will it be a picture?"

"I beg to."

"Very much so, I hope."

I painted that portrait in the Pagelly garden, with Rita posed on an old milk stool, & with the white cottage & its blue bay as a background. For a child, & a very lively & vivacious little creature she was a good sitter, & she chattered away to me, which did not matter. I prefer a live face to a dead one, but very soon & again she would pump up & come & stand beside me to look at the result of her own labour. She did this very willingly, & she had clasped her hand of

her, & her long head held high.
 "Is that really me, Mr Robert?"
 "It is as I see you, Rita."
 "Have I got all those freckles?"
 I checked.

"Don't you like them?"
 "I don't know."
 "I'll leave out the freckles, if you like."

And then she said something which gave me pause to think.

"I wonder if ^{my} many will like it."

That question of mine came considerably. Had I given her all the possibilities? The Pagell might be writing one of her weekly letters, & I should be aware of it, inevitably & not problematically so. The woman Mr Robert Bayan was partly Rita's parent. Did I want her to know yet that I ^{had} followed the clue a fragment of two pages had given me? How would she take it, for she was still incredible to me, & was somehow, the one woman who could make me afraid. And I am sufficiently old far back to believe that when a man could fear the love that was in her, that love was not a mere thing of the flesh.

Could I take the Pagell into my confidence? And did Rita write letters?

I said - "Back on the stool, little lady."

She went & sat on the stool, & then she asked me of those questions which dignified me now.

"Why are you ^{knowing} Mr Robert?"

"Knowing? Oh, well, this is a very serious business, Rita."
 It was.

Sat how much did the Pagell know? I let the child challenge to me, & now, again I let her off the stool, & engaged the back of a chair, & she ^{came} did ^{down} the wall a kind of childish dignity. She seemed quite without fear, or any of those complicated reactions which arrive with the cultivation of the ego. In fact she was ^{entirely} untroubled, & I began to realize that the child might mean about as much to me as the mother.

^{for good}
 I was still at work when Pagell came up the hill for his dinner, & when I glanced at his face I got the impression

that he was not pleased. My father had begun to mean so much to him that this dark Carabian could be jealous.

"Hallo, Peter. - Don't Peter portrait."

It was obvious. He pushed the gate open rather roughly with his foot, & stood back at my work. I stood up, & smiled at him.

"I think Peter has had enough for one morning. Here's an idea, Peter. Why shouldn't I do a family group, - the three of you."

His face lit up. He picked up the child & handed her.

"What do you say to that, you bit of mischief?"

Peter crinkled up his forehead & gave me over his shoulder.

"I could not a Thun's lip, could I?"

Pagell chuckled & handed her in the forehead.

"Tell you one thing, no!"

"What's that, Peter?"

"The lack are going to have a ^{bottom} time of it some day, no!"

So, Peter's portrait was finished, & I was pleased with it, & talked to the Pagells of exhibiting it in London. Then, in the evening I got the photo to pose for me, Peter & Pagell's. I told them the picture was to be a present. The Pagells seemed quite excited & happy about it; he had proposed sitting for me in the Sunday paper, but I told I preferred his work in a group.

"You must be looking at Peter, without drawing the part."

I caught him looking at me in a particular way. She seemed to be lit up of a sudden, & more brightly coloured, & I thought "Why can't these good people have what they lay for?"

It was a fourth day at St. Anne's, & I had got the Rover into shape. He had given me a long letter of the Cornish hills, & there was no more over-heat. I was still wondering whether the owner of my dog at St. Anne's had reached the window. I was troubled about it, for I did not want him to know until I was back at Holford.

I came out of my cottage on my way to breakfast, & I found Peter Pagell at the garden gate. He was smoking a pipe, & his face had a curious rosy tint. He turned & looked his cap to me.

"Don't get the morning, no!"

"Pretty fine, Peter."

"Will you come out in my boat, you - up to St. Julian. He'll take the child!"

"I'd love to, Peter."

"And no charge, no."

I got the impression that he was very happy about something, & his eyes must have told me that he was ^{very} pleased. He said that he would have his boat at the quay by ten o'clock, if that would suit me. I said it would. I went down to my breakfast, wondering whether my impression had now really meant a part of Pajelly's face had that its shadowed look.

It was a perfect morning, & we set off at ten, Peter & my house, Peter at the cabin. His boat was painted a soft blue, & she seemed part of the sea, & he did not drive her hard, but let her glide placidly over the still water. He had taken his cap off, & his head had had a sheen, & so had his face. The child sat happily in my house, & was happily silent.

The hills & woods about the sea were a cloudless blue, & the new white mellow in the hills. Almost I could forgive these hills for being there on the summer morning. Pajelly was so much in his place, & I gave Peter an occasional tinkle, & he supplied a lighted all over. What a single occurrence, & yet how profoundly satisfying. I was thinking of the "Madness" world, & the will, & the fact that was madness. Boredom, a blackness, no joy for a little while, no melody, just men crying of love with other men, literature that ^{was} mostly but a shadow of happiness showing & shining despite. I felt that the child in my house was so much more right than real, a creature of perfect health who had not been debauched by too many toys. And had he nothing with the supreme vision of one who had suffered, planned to keep her so, like a wild flower on a rocky bank.

He was moving up towards St. Julian when Pajelly took his pipe out of his mouth.

"Got a bit of news, no?"

"How good, Peter?"

Has I to hear that my secret had been revealed. I saw that he was smiling all over his face.

"Yes, - you've brought it back. - Pajelly told me exactly this morning."

He smiled his pipe at me & grinned.

"Right - it will be a girl if all goes right."

I just said I had a little signified it.

"Pretty fine, Peter."

"Will you come out in my boat, you - up to St. Julian. He'll take the child!"

"I'd love to, Peter."

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"Got a bit of news, no?"

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Now I too had the secret had been revealed. I saw that he was smiling all over his face.

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He smiled his pipe at me & smiled.

"Right - it will be a girl if all goes right."

I just said I had a little signified it.

quietly

"That's great man, Peter."
 "Yes, good blue hair. She's been buying it recent while she was here."
 She Rita mugged round, & looked up at me.
 "What's Under mean, Don Robert?"
 "Mean you said" said S. "Tell you what though, gay lady, I think I'll go over to Fabian's & buy you a doll."

I took the car out that afternoon & drove to Fabian's by way of the King Harry ferry. The River behaved sweetly, but I did not find Fabian's house. I had known it mostly from out of season when it had been somewhat thick & not yet another mad-house for the million. I managed to park the car in the main square, but when it came the main one legs in the main street one was made to think of a football crowd pouring out of the ground. I will confess that I have a topographical dir. like of my crowded out, & pulled, & I have often wandered at the intersection of the ordinary man & woman. One can only suppose that they are so accustomed to walking in the million that they become insensitive to such close contact, like a flock of sheep bunched through a gate.

I bought a doll for Rita, a pipe & some tobacco for Percy, & a leather bag for his wife, & escaped. I had to get back into the car a escape, & as I had plenty of time I drove by way of Malpas - Thomas' Mal Pasage. What, I sold a man with me & I found myself wondering what kind of a fellow King had been. Ventable Howard, fooled by a cup of wine with its live poison, or a somewhat pathetic person choked by life & inevitable youth.

I went to find St. James & Fabian's in miniature. The invasion was the worst I had experienced, & a motor-car was blocked the lane leading up to the hotel garage. It was a peculiar ascent at all times, with dirt-beds on one side of the road, & a scattering of houses on the other. You prayed to God that you might hit a button & ruin a piece.

The driver of the coach was not to be seen & he may have been having tea or an air at the chalet by the quay, so there was nothing to be done about it for the moment & I parked the car on the slope to the east of the "Ship's Castle." I could not do away with St. James because one was a place of peace. I climbed the white steps to the hotel & found at the table in the hall where winter letters were laid out. There was one for me, & I recognized Bill's boyish handwriting.

I took that letter into the lower lounge. I am one of those peculiar people who have feelings about letters, especially those which ~~touch~~ ^{contain} winter letters from winter people, & I had felt fully about Bill's letter. I opened it & read.

"Dear Son"

A lady called here today, the one who has worked at "The Meadow." She asked when you would be back. I told her I did not know.

Yours respectfully
Bill.

P.S. The lady seemed worried. "

I sat for half a minute staring at Bill's letter. Then I folded it up & put it away in my breast pocket & went out to the car. I drove her to the garage & found Joe. I told him I should be leaving early in the morning, & I asked him to look her over as to oil & the pressure. Also, I would get her to garage her for the night so that I could get off without delay for the Ship & the "Garage" was apt to provide me with a problem in pain. I told the parents & I bid her love to my cottage, & I told the good lady that I should be leaving next morning.

I found the Payella at tea & Peta had her doll. She cuddled it with the tenderness of a gay mother.

"Off tomorrow - early, Peta?"
Payella was rubbing the pipe I had bought her, & her nose was smiling over her bag.

"Sorry for that, no."

"Oh, well, - I may be down again."

Peta's face was averted to me.

"Do come again now, Mr Robert."

I left them at the tea table & went down to ^{write} tell the hotel that I should be leaving early & could I have my bill by eight o'clock. I was thinking of my signature & a note and "Paul Parry."

(after 112)

I wish Dan had not gone away just now.
When will he be back?

I'm frightened.

The Beast tried to don last night.

I said - "If you find that don I'll throw you out of
the window."

I should have fought him like a wild cat, & one of the
stiffs are sleeping alone. They would have dealt my record, &
they are not having Howard.

But how filthy a picture it all is. I ought to be in the
Romaine's game of Vietnam.

He is drinking like a fish, path - I suspect - because the Club
is not doing well. He stalked with a bag - then
frightened.

The Dance Band has walked out on him.
I suppose all this makes an evil creature even more evil.

What a night! I hope he came!

I wish Dan had not gone away just now.

I have been near to Hurlford to see when he will
be back.

I must tell him the truth, I must tell him. It is cowardly
a way to go on like this.

XVIII

I have been for a week, a sweet self again, & all that day I pushed her to the limit. It was no scenic drive so far as I was concerned - I do not remember being conscious of England the country though which I ^{passed} ~~drove~~. A hill was just a hill to be reached, & a village an obstruction to be crossed or bypassed. I admit that I took notice what I should not have taken on a normal drive, & that once or twice I played the road-hog & must have caused other folk to curse me. I might have been back in the war & told my Company into an attack, & I suppose that those years of tense fun & of fear have left the heart of skin of our soul more than a little. I saw a rattlesnake & was left wondering with me like a day-over, & I was fully entitled & capable of killing. Had Harwood played the brute to her, or threatened her with some suborned beast?

That they fit me with one all through that day drive, & if the car ran sweetly there was no noisiness in me.

I did give myself half an hour for a quick bath, & I believe it was at 4 o'clock, but I made such ^{good} going that I passed Big Lake late in the afternoon. Another fast Indian de no, & I should be home, & what sort of home-coming would be mine? I did not touch my tobacco pouch & pipe all day, though a sticky patcher during the war I had smoked like a chimney.

I had left good weather behind me in Cornwall, but the
familiar I may deem had a grey melancholy, with a clouded sky &
no sunlight & the suggestion of a small cast ^{down} wind. But at an
corner? And I had little Peter patiently carefully mapped up
on the back seat, & as Peter gave over the ^{face} of a
smile, the hand of ^{me} I would wish for ^{you} the mother's
face. - What had happened? Had anything happened? Strange
how one can feel gentle to one particular creature while willing
much to another.

I had visited Bill from St. Mary, where I came to my own
 father. I found them after for me. I drove in, pulled up &
 sat for a moment looking at the scene which I loved so well,
 the meadow & the river, the old house, the cedar. I could just
 see "Mabel" on yonder, & the two slanting spires were like
 a great hand stretched out in a blessing. I had good for
 some years a peaceful come such as this. And was it to be
 peace or violence?

Bill had heard the car, & he came out to me with a look

that I released a his faithful face. Behind all the guise of your
 pleasure, but his still had it's quality.

"Had a good drive, sir?"

I was studying his face. It seemed to be one mouth-cut and
 a brilliant.

"I've been driving it, Bill. Any news?"

"No, sir." It seemed to me that he was worried.

I was curious of relief, or was it deflation?

He collected my bag for the car, but I collected the
 child's portrait. When Bill to put the car away I carried the
 picture straight to the studio, I stood it up against the
 wall. Had all my spread a fair been so far? I had walked
 straight into the studio, a while I stared about I saw he was
 close behind the door.

"Smiles!"

She gave me a kind of flicking look, he looked flicking, he had
 looked together in his eye. I stood quite still. A little, waving
 smile repeated in face.

"I heard you were coming back today."

I wanted to take those looked back of her a hair then, but as
 I had felt my way before I chimed in his resistance, a
 "Please don't touch me" look.

I said - "I hope the make has been good. - Have they
 been good with you?"

Her look dropped, a she looked down at her back.

"Oh, yes. - I manage."

Now, just what did she mean? I stared, collected a stool,
 & sat down opposite her.

"May I say something to you?"

She gave me one quick, furtive look.

"I don't know - S -"

"Look" said I, leaning forward, "there are now things I
 can stand, other - that make me feel murderous. - You have
 been while I was away."

"Yes, - S -"

"By dear, it seems to take a long time for me to make
 you realize that I'm not quite the carnival card."

"Is this the way you meet mine."

"Must I tell you - that I think I know that? - Be patient with
 me."

For a moment - She looked at me with a huge steadfastness for a moment, & I
 could see the child in her. Patient? What if she knew of the
 secret of carnival child? And then I that sudden confession came
 to me. A secret, her secret! She was afraid of what she might

how to tell me, & he for me - I go, I think I understood.
 It mattered to her, & a surge of loneliness swept over me.

I said - "My dear, I have a new way of life, I'm no saint, I'm just a girl - I'm just a girl for you. - I think of that - always. I will be patient."

She stood up, & her face was flushed & shining.
 "You are a good man, Robert. I thank you for that. - It helps me."

She put out a hand, & I bent & kissed it.
 "I must be going now."

I sat with her to the magazine. Bill & the car had gone ^{we} ^{a way} ^{back} to that house. I offered her of the gate for him.

"Let me see you -"

She looked frightened.
 "Please, no. I can manage."

So just she about ran from me & I was left standing there, & faced by a double problem. Had she ever told me the truth about the child, & found that she could not do it - or not yet? And was my reaction so important to her that she was afraid? There was deep a long, long time. Poor darling! - If she had known what I had brought back with me? And then I found myself regarding the other & sinister side of the picture. He knew. And how he persecuted her, trying to persuade her that she was humoured him? - I felt all my muscles go hard. - Awfully, if that was so the time was ripe for me to take a hand.

Yes, but how delicately must the part be played. - If I were to persuade her to come again to the studio, & demand that picture to her -?

Then - I remembered that other picture. She had not seen it yet, for I had put it away before going to St. Anne. - I could forget the portrait I had painted for money, & try to persuade her to let me paint - the next.

Yes, - why not? - I think I realised now how fragile a flower was the girl in man, & to those who are much closer modern to I suppose much more pathetic woman would have appeared ^{rather} ridiculous or more pitiful allured. All were played up to me, & most were prepared potent cards.

I am all such shallow egotism. I had got to work all for her face.

The next day was a Saturday, & I was becoming curious about "The Madonna" for other reasons, that I could read anywhere, &

(After 115)

Smart after Sept. - Page 166

I met Dan "Ball" when I went to put a letter
a he told me ^{that} his mother would be home that evening.

I should have been a dach, but there are less than ^{three}
people in the house - I went across to Huntfield. I wandered
round the garden, & sat for a while in the garden house. What
a contrast to "The Meadows"! This place has green old &
was a kind, & I can meditate how de love I. I could love
it & death so, after the shabby things I have suffered. I
could see Pete playing due. But is that possible?

Then I made my way to his studio. It was all so much
his, his boy's - Poor I faith in the wall, the easel, the
table that carried his books & palette. I sat down on a chair
behind the door. I could feel his door, his loved room of
colour & of quiet, his furthermost picture. And what was I?
A poor fool. G.V., a fool in my first adventure, & a
rich, sceptical fool in this - my far more good & clear
career. I had thought his first experience man, vain, a
re-pleasure. Shall I chat? But was not my justification
part of what I had suffered?

Then I heard a coughing. I sat shakily like a
girl. I was afraid. What I wanted to hide from him.
Footstep. He came in. He did not see me at first, &
then he turned & found me there.

How his face lit up! It was a good man's face, a human
face.

And those clear words of his.

Should I have the courage to tell him? I can't have the
courage.

But if the love should go out of his eyes!

also economic. I cannot claim to emulate one of those excellent "Teachers" in "The Lion" whose name ^{appears} ^{in the} report path ^{with} another report into publication phase, & leave you ^{nothing} ^{with} you have any recollection of the first paragraph. I expect ^{in your} hands, & at school I was a total suffer. First I was not against "The Meadows" as a parody, a miniature & much more of the Monte Carlo in my class. I visited the place a little bit at symbolized removed; for certainly I would have prepared it as a Victorian how far etc. I would Bill on the subject. What sort of work had they enjoyed?

-16. Pull apart, do.

" Observation re. internal information, Bell."

"Well, no. I have seen the chef at the job. He's a Pole, but not a bad bloke. The stuff is rather feed up."

BL. Syn dom?

well, she - the fair lady who saw it, - became one, & a -

"No apology needed, Bill. You can call the gentleman what you please."

"He's mean & a bully, & I guess the show's not going
as he thought it would."

" Good morn, y' las. - You & I have been through the rough
together, & the way they that make an ex-serviceman want to
be in' the rest of the war. I've each ^{who} ^{much} ~~more~~ ^{many} ~~many~~
while we were in that timber, greenin' the damed belly.
Here me, Bill."

He said.

" Tell you one thing, mi', we chaps dat mind a craftsman like you selling the gunner. - It's the fader a then like that get us mad."

"I know, Bill, but I rather think casual work may be running a bit short, & the ager-scraper finish' life not so good."

"I hope so, Sir."

(Squint Previous Page line, & by itself.)

new Page.
interview

I strolled across in that Saturday evening when church had
fallen & there were few men came to be seen. Also, I heard no
orchestra & orchestra can be expected because there days. Woods'
show that started with a bang, yet in a few weeks it might
be stormy sign of falling. It was a striking sight, & the
yellow & black was seen from the garden, & the table was
decorated. I had heard two champagne given together & while
much enjoyed - a big house, & then the guests were

suggestion. I walked on the grass, & looked at the lighted window of the bar & the dining room, & it seemed to me that if "The President" crashed, I would be out of a job. All, there was a ^{perhaps a very slight} job waiting for me!

I walked cautiously to one of the bar windows & keeping close to the wall, peered in. The place was about empty, no whiskey, no early breakfast, but the two leaders of the drama were there, I would say Horwood. He was sitting on a stool with his shoulders hunched, & his head bowed, his eyes fixed between them. He had a glass in his hand. I would say nothing, & staring at his own back while he sat on the bar counter.

I saw Horwood eyeing his glass at one gulp, & pass it to her.

"Fill me up again."

She took the glass, & put it down.

"You're dead then."

"Well, it's my own drink, my dear."

She remained silent, staring at the empty glass.

"I am not your dear."

That remark seemed to exasperate him. I saw as he was in a savage temper, & far more nervous than one. I saw his right hand go out & grasp her wrist.

"Look here, my dear, I'm not exactly in a sweet temper. If you'd been human help full -"

Suddenly she twisted free, & stood back, looking him in the face.

"Helpful! I suppose -"

I saw her jerk up from her stool.

"Look, my dear, I'm pretty well fed up with your bloody friendship."

She did not flinch, but looked steadily at his flushed & twisted face.

"I suppose you remain so, Mr. Horwood. - I am not especially alone - here. - Be warned."

And suddenly he sat down again on his stool.

"All right, all right, damn you. I'm worried. - Tell that glass up for me, & make it a stiff one."

Deliberately she refilled his glass, & placed it before him. He was lighting a cigarette, & his shoulders sagged.

"Thank you, lovely. - I'll damn this & give you the show's go. Some damned lads have hit me down. It will have to be all radio."

I remained there on guard until he had emptied his glass &

rice being for his stool. I saw his face for a moment, & it was really a fortune, but I got the feeling that none of the women had caught out of him.

"Better can a flop and with one or two of the old South."

"I bet you" said she - "I prefer them on the other side of the counter."

Maybe I was too early - foolishly nervous by the way in which she had kept her at arm's length, for I went back to my house & so to bed, ~~unwillingly~~ ~~and~~ ~~habit~~. I decided to be up bright & early & on the way in I saw she took that as home of escape from the ~~inner~~ ~~outer~~ but when I drew the curtain next morning it was raining ~~steadily~~. That & good news either for me or "The Meadows" I dare would be no part of a the river. I had had breakfast & put on a macintosh & went out, & my back was in, for I saw her going to the pillbox house in the lane, & I waited for her at the river gate. On her way back she saw my hesitation, stood still.

I crossed the road.

"I beg to differ rather quiet with you but right. I say head for car down stairs."

She was silent, as though waiting for something.

"Are you in a mood to grant pleas?"

She ~~was~~ ^{still} silent.

"I want to part your portrait." "My P?"

She glanced at the gate of "The Meadows."

"I'm in duty all today."

"Well, what of tomorrow?" "If it is fine it can happen in the garden."

She stood there with her hand to her cheek, & I could divine her busy decision.

"I right - would it be long?"

"Say then about nothing."

"Perhaps, perhaps not."

"Well - I'll wait for the perhaps."

When I woke next morning the sun was bright upon the blind. So the weather had changed its temper & was as usual of May. Did she not tell me a hour ago with it? ~~was~~ ~~that~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~seen~~ ~~again~~? Did she fear that the celebration of Christmas, an illegitimate child & an association with a place like "The Meadows" got from too sinister to be accepted?

by an man who was not a scolded fool? - Perhaps. She wanted me to trust her just as I was trying to persuade her to trust me. And yet - ye fash - how easily rich hands would have upon a cheaply purchased stay - and gone to bed with ^{you} to prove the point.

Yes, it was going to be a gorgeous day, rain washed a bright & serene. I was sitting up & expectant. Would she come? I spent part of the morning on the river, & I walked up & down. The American party lay idle at their morning, & one solitary old fellow was sitting in a deck-chair reading the Sunday paper.

After lunch I carried over a stool & covered it up against the garden, with a cushioned chair for my subject. I placed this in a corner where they would not be visible from the road. - I told Bill that I was expecting a visitor, & that we would have tea in the garden. Then I sat down to wait.

I left looking at my wrist-watch. Half past two, a quarter to three, three o'clock. I became restless & got up & wandered about. I stood for a minute or two just inside the iron gate, but saw no sign of her. Was it to be - "Perhaps not?" I went back to my stool, & filled & lit a pipe, & then I heard the clang of the Houtgill gate. - She had come.

I stood up. I could not see the gate from where I stood, but there was exultation in me. And then I saw him shuffling up the drive, & my exultation became cold again. He ^{spotted me} - turned in my direction. His white beard head caught the sunlight. I saw a smile upon his mouth as he came to me.

"Ha, Mr. Byson, excuse me this morning."

He looked at my card & chair & stool, & the smile became more evident.

"Sent a message. - Miss Shelley has a bad headache. She's quite prostrated. Most disappointing." I thought I would let you know.

He grinned at me, waved an innocent paw, & turned about. My impulse was to go & take him by the collar & shake the dirt out of him, but my Mr. Byson was in no hurry. I let him go. I heard the gate clang.

Had he threatened to spill his secret if she came to me? It was more than possible. But what an anticlimax!

(After 120)

He wants to paint my portrait.
I have said yes.

To sit in that peaceful room with him. Perhaps the courage
will come to me.

I cannot let him go in looking at me like that - without
his knowing.

Can I look at him as he looks at me?
I cannot help it.

How can I not make a coward of me!
And I thought I was old booted soldier, & tough at that.

Space.

Oh - that heart of a Howwood!

I found him waiting for me when I got back. He had
been drinking. He took me into his office - & shut the
door. I stood by the door, with my back to it. He employed
a chair & looked at me.

"Rightly, you deserve, my dear, I think."

"I am not used to right."

I sat down to rest his head on my right.

"Look here, Billy, take my advice & keep away from the
Scallan & his friends."

"Do I believe in you as to my friends?"

"But he is a bloody fool. You know quite well what he is
after - if any body is to believe you again - it must be
the S. & P. man."

I am not any more scared.

"So - what, the Bally?"

"Quite right - isn't it?"

I just go round & tell the
fellow the truth - about Carter & all that. I tell him too to
keep away from my master, or I'll throw the life out of him.

It didn't seem credible."

"Then please, isn't you?"

"Well, take your choice."

"I'll pull the hairs."

For help me - I finished it.

XIX

the Nashville
chapel.

On that Sunday evening I walked to State Nashville church for the evening service, a thing I sometimes did, for I liked the simple service: that little old grey balding with its dyed spine & its old gown. I liked the old people & the people who worshipped here, for it was still somewhat the church of the peasant, folk who labored on the land. I could picture it deep full of folks on Sunday mornings, with their wives & children. I saw some faded battle flags here, memorial tablets on the walls, & the ~~historic~~ the Jacobean look of the Nashville. There is no tower & a south porch in such old places, with their ancient ritual, & their flavor of faith.

He says "Fight the good fight," & when the old pastor mounted the pulpit, with his white head & middle face, I had a feeling that he might have something to say that might be valid for me as well as for others. He preached on "Gorge & Lincoln." I saw some on church steps about the old pastor. He had served as a pastor in the past world war, was the D. C. & was taken prisoner in March 1918.

Gorge & Lincoln. There is much talk of over-sophistication, of the ~~intellectual~~ ^{over-sophistication} but I must confess that over-elaboration seems to be one of the problems of the day. Have things may have become more complex, & much more than a biggest change, but the simple virtues remain. Have faith, don't let your feet down, don't jump this - even though you feel a devil of a fight. I'd often felt talked about character, we are persuaded to visit psycho-analysis & get involved in primitive problems. As for Lincoln, the old man in the pulpit admitted that it was the one value that our world needed. He searched our consciences & showed, & became spiritual & jealous. Do the job which he happens to have given you, do it with all your heart & strength, & don't feel diminished because you don't happen to be a Churchill. I think with the whole, historic & country. That was the pull of the old man's sermon. It was Biblical, & not called from a text-book of psychology. The moderns are much too intricate & tricky. ~~Man~~ ^{Man} may be a complex creature, but his essential reaction are simple & inevitable. He does not respond to over-education; he asks to be moved, & moved by a ray on a story.

I waited in the porch for the pastor. He had given me something that I needed, the Gorge to challenge emotion. I stood up

when he appeared, a put out a hand.

"Isabel, no, for the reason."

He smiled that happy & deep conviction smile of his.

"Was it a reason, Mr. Byers?"

I laughed, & he with me.

"Well, no, not exactly. Sander Old is now in that cabaret for the modern."

"And what is - modern?"

"Simply that he is just on the good earth, & forget it - because it is dead is a political."

He chuckled. ^{staring}

"Yes, we are so strong by words, & the way around."

"Life being too much of a mystery, Sir."

I walked home with the old man, & with me. Obviously I had over-estimated the situation, & a woman may not ask a man to fight for her. I was a rebel, but to change his mind. I saw the prospect of a fight, & my problem was would we be solved by a victory.

I did not go to the President that night, for the Sabbath & that reason asked to be considered. I put the matter in order, & placed the child's portrait for her to see, but I did make out into the lane & look at the window of what I saw felt to be her prison house. If Howard had been up with me, I should not have been, & if necessary you had the things he needed. I will confess that I looked over the prospect, & my impression was that he considered me a more colorful city.

It was about ten o'clock when I walked towards the H. street field gate. I had warned Bill & Betty that I might have a letter in the studio, & that I did not want to be disturbed. Old Potter was taking a day off in his own cottage garden. I was within a few yards of the gate when I saw Howard's red car parked at the front of the lane. He seemed to see that the road was clear, & then drove off in the direction of Abbotsbridge. My impression was that I had not noticed him.

I crossed the road, walked up the meadow drive, & in of the forest down. She was there in the large, arched flower in a tall plain rose, and when she saw me she stood quite still, the shadow of a creature who is afraid. Then she made some to step, touch the flower, but she gave me no more, & she had moved slowly.

I said - "Soldier, - I have nothing to show you."

"I'm afraid - I'm busy here."

I walked into the house & stood close to her. He had the place to ourselves.

"It is really rather important, my dear."

The fellow needed no more attention, but she continued to stand there, & she looked so like a scared child that my decision was inevitable. It was the cutting of the throat. I put an arm round her, & felt her stiffen.

"You are coming to see what I have to show you, even if I have to carry you, my dear."

I was there & so was she, & then I felt a hand ^{melting} of her shoulder.

"What is it?"

"Yes, you must. - Something that may matter terribly to both of us. And it is good, not evil."

She moved with a soft, swaying motion as I swung her gently towards the door. I heard voices, & she gave me a quick, appealing glance, & I bit my own lip.

"No turning back - now!"

She sighed, but for you had lost that stage of fear.

He was out with the ^{young} man together. He passed down the drive & out of the gate & across the road, & when we were clear of the gate I took her hand, & she did not resist. Her hand right down her child's hand, contentedly but firmly, & I felt a great gladness in me.

"Not the house, - but the studio."

She was hostile to me, - but about her lips I saw the beginning of a smile. I believe that she thought that I had been putting her in a room, which I had, but that was not the portrait of the man. As we crossed the lawn above the drive I saw Mrs. The Lane signalling to me in the twilight, or that was my fancy, & I glanced & pointed out the carriage to her.

"Do you see that tree?"

"Which one?"

"The fellow was there with the lantern top."

"Yes."

I took my signature tree, & he is blessing both of us the morning. So, we came to the studio, & I opened the door for her, & let go of her hand. The child's portrait was facing us, & she must have seen it instantly for she stood rigidly very still.

I had been wondering all the while whether a letter from Mary
Peyton might have given away my secret, but as I stood & watched
Sister I knew that it was not so.

I left it now quite half a minute before she spoke.

"Where - did you -"

"I kept my distance."

"I had a place called St. Thomas. Rita & I discussed each other,
& I fell for Rita. - but you go now?"

She took then a few slow steps, & stood looking at the
picture, with an effort to be cheerful. She said - in a strange
half-stylized voice - "So, you know."

I went close to her now, & put my hand on her shoulder.

"All that I need to know, of dear. You can leave it all
just where you please."

Suddenly she turned & looked at me, in a new way.

"Did you go there - when you went away?"

"I needed."

"You remember that letter which was delivered here by mistake.
No, I did not open it. I saw the postmark. And do
you remember taking it up & throwing the piece into the river?"

Well, there must have been something inevitable about it all.
One piece floated into my boat house, & as it was there as usual
- Rita."

She was silent.

"Yes, just that. - Perhaps you will forgive me - some day."

"I ought to forgive you now."

She was close to each other now, & I dropped my hand down
- but I am about her.

"Rita is a lovely little face. And about the hair you said, but
lighter. - I feel for the little freckles on her nose. And it's
so clear - happy."

She was right for some seconds. Then she said -

"Can you understand that in a rather faintly would a little the
like that - can - somehow - days are same."

"I can, & very much so."

She raised her hand & clasped my hand.

"Thank you. - But you don't know - yet -"

"And I?"

"Of course."

Well, when you please, of course. - And now I am going to
paint your portrait."

I removed the child's picture & propped it on a chair, &
placed a fresh canvas on the easel. I had a chair upon which

I sat in a good old leather chair. There was a sudden
 fly-flicker in the air. I became the 18th century ^{last of heart} ^{with a sympathy}
 I brought my body to take the chair. I shaded my eyes, & as
 she tried to meet half of mood of happy fly-flicker seemed to
 me as if it were.

"Thank you, ma'am."

"I thank you."

"Will you stay in the chair?"

She sat & her face was perfect, & I had a feeling that her face
 had been like the face of a child. She gave me one of those
 machine-like looks, & I have the first time that I had seen happy
 smiling in her eyes.

"All - but the fletcher, madam."

"You feel for the fletcher?"

"I don't."

"I wonder if they are pleasant. - ^{fifteen} ^{from} you time she went
 have them."

"Some will."

I had placed my table of ^{plants} a broom - etc below the
 chair, & ^{the} ^{small} I ^{thought} at her as you had an about
 trying a good look.

"You know, ma'am, you were not quite - credible."

"Credible? - Just - why?"

"Her you told me."

"So I said too good - look to be credible."

Could I think? - But I think I understood her.

"You would say that only the plain contains the face."

"I right."

"I have been uncertain."

"I begin to think now - that there can be."

It is a good of mine that I prefer to paint in a short, with
 the sleeves rolled up, & I lay my coat over the back of a
 chair. I had a feeling that this was going to be all
 conversation piece as well as the beginning of a portrait. I
 took a glance at her. She was seated there with perfect
 ease, shoulders a cross relaxed, her face like a fresh
 that seemed the beginning of a smile.

"Excellent" said I.

I know intuitively when a sitter is at ease, or staying up ^{a time} with
 self-consciousness.

"Do I tell?"

"Of course."

"Did that pass - well?"

"Perfectly. Without fear or favour."

She smiled.

"Then, you, there has been no real fear. - I was born in Vienna. I saw the French & the Russian, & then - the English."

I looked up at her over the canvas.

"Do you know - the first time I saw you - it was in Vienna or Florence."

She closed her eyes for a moment, & spoke.

"My father was Austrian, my mother - English. He came to England after the old days. - After it all happened I took my mother name. 'Duchess'."

"She opened her eyes & looked down at me, & I felt the urgent question at that look."

"It is a lovely name. - So, you married an Englishman?"

She did not ~~move~~, but looked at me steadily.

"I thought I did."

I began to paint.

"And then I..."

"He came to England. He was sent to Palestine. He was killed there. - Only then - did I find out that I was not his wife."

I looked a bit at my eyes for a moment on the canvas.

"You poor darling."

"Oh. I suppose it was just the war. You can make men like that; since the liberation & dawn tomorrow. Peter was born, a month after I found out. - I had a little money, but it was short. I took two or three different jobs, but they lasted only - until I had to say no."

"I told I got your name. Quite a number of respectable citizens need that."

He was right for a minute or so, I painted, & she looked on at me.

I said - "Do you know how much this touches me? Thank you, my dear."

"I'll go on. The last time I went to a new Agency, a head of this. - I was sick of London. I wanted to be in the country, & this seemed good. I met him & he was quite pleasant to me, and - I had learnt to look after myself. I had got a short, cheap holiday to St. Moritz, & about the Papillon. - Good people."

"Very good."

" I hated it, - but I left her with them. It all seemed so clear
 + hand down there."

" So the man - it is."

" I was coming back - that day we met at Paddington."

" I met a friend."

" I will - I had never to be so much available about all
 this. I would like to think of it in that way. May I?"

" I stand up - now do you see what I mean - then I decided
 to see what was going on - you put me towards the

studio door.

" I heard his voice."

" Very pretty, very pretty indeed!"

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Sir Reginal Worthington

(After 126.)

He came for me, & I remembered. I just felt that this
was fate. And neither there nor laughter at the back of
his eye, looking after, & not the glow of his cheek.
I just did not care. I drifted, & that in the studio - I
saw the child's face look at me from the wall, & my
face seemed to go weak. - So he knew. But how - I
saw that?

He was my father with me, a fall of play, a teacher
continues. I ought have been a great Providence. As I
that to him. That is what he made me feel.
I sat on that old French chair, & he began to paint, &
I know the time had come to tell him my thing. It seemed
so easy now, little as I was, to a man & a great man. I
watched his face & it did not lose its lower look, & I
thought - I even
down on my knees a heart - left for you till I have
no hands left.

He talked of that day at Princeton. He said that it
all seemed suitable now, & I noticed what a shallow
fool I had been in misreading him. ^{Now}
And then - what I ought have expected - the Real
standing in the studio doorway, ^{he} his much voice.
"Very pretty, very pretty indeed!"

He was standing in the studio doorway, his legs a little stiff, his hands in his trouser pockets, & there was an odd gleam in his face. So, he had played a trick on me, taken his car out, wanted to come back to create the crisis, for a crisis it was to be.

I stood & faced him, & I began with ironic courtesy.

"I think you can conclude that I do not unless mention when I am working, Mr. Howard."

He gave me back my.

"And are you, really, Mr. Ryan."

"I am faint, Mr. Malley," I said.

He strolled in, his belly a little red, cheeks red to the cheeks.

"I conclude of you to me the Mrs.," Mr. Ryan.

I then he caught sight of the child's picture on the ^{chair} ~~sofa~~, & tried to look at it.

"All right. - I am most little bastard in front of the fact."

I put down my brush & palette. I kept a handbell in the studio (on a side table) & I rang it. I placed at S. table. She was standing, by a blacked, & my eyes were on her.

I said - "I think the interview is - over - ^{case} ~~case~~, Mr. Howard."

"As you please."

He pushed the child's portrait to one side, & spread on the sofa.

I then Betty appeared, & I spoke to her.

"Oh, - Betty, will you please show Mr. Malley into the parlor."

I saw her hesitate. She gave me a fidgety look, & I gathered that her fear was for me. I smiled at her, & she stopped down from the door.

I said - "He can go on with the work presently."

How much Betty knew or guessed I cannot say. Anyhow the two women went out together, & I shall always remember the backward look I sold a - gave me. It said - "Oh, take care. He can be dangerous." "Dangerous?" And I was fairly damned dangerous, & only too ready for action. I went & closed the studio door & locked it, & I found the key up & down so that he might draw his own conclusions.

"Now, Mr. Howard: Have you any more unpleasant things to say?"

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He layed on the sofa, wiggly his great legs, sayin' me mainly.
Had gone prepared to produce the venetian villain of melodrama
in me it.

"Rather innocent, Mr. Brown, aren't you? Or are you."
"Not so innocent."

He flopped the back of a hand against the child's forehead.

"You don't object to another fellow bastard."

"Let's say I object to either sort of blackguard."

He layed.
"Meaning me."

I nodded at him. I was getting colder & colder in my eyes,
& more exultantly cool. I turned the studio by up & down,
then slipped it into a hanging pocket.

"By the bye, Mr. Howard."

"I like no."

"Well, out with it."

"I suppose you are the sort of every who falls for another
man's tart."

I looked at him steadily.

"Get up, Howard. There is only one thing to do with a
creep that has hit you."

I'll admit that I was about caught out by the surprising something
with which he bounced up off the sofa & came at me. He
swung a leg, a back for me I was very much on my toes, &
that dirty trick failed to work. He's about got backed up body.
I caught him by the cable with both hands & gave him a
twist, & then threw it up. He went down with a crash that
shook the floor, & lay there for a second or two, - died yet
furious. I had hurt him.

I said - "No more end's tricks, Howard. Get up &
fight."

He sat up, & turned sideways on the floor, & looked for me I
guessed what he gave me. He meant to make a dash for my
leg & get me down, & that was what he tried. Well, two
small tricks, & I swung a leg & caught him a lovely one on
the chin, & it so stunned him that his back failed. He spat
three half dozen, & I waited.

"I know how of these tricks, Howard. Get up & fight, you
fat bastard."

He sat glum at me, his back on the floor. Then he was
up, but not so quickly, - I sailed in at him. I was full
good, oh so damned good. I finished with my left & then
got in an upper-cut with my right. It jerked his head back, &

clashed his, & his feet legs rapped.

I held off a moment, ~~staring~~ at him. Given a good look I judged such a show as this, & I was minded to spin it out. The show he made a grab at a stool, & my eyes flashed.

"Put that down, you filthy punk!"

He made a dash for it, but I wadded it off, ^{but} the blow hurt me, & I went mad. I hauled the stool from him, ^{around} & set about him without mercy. He ^{recoiled} about a step, & then he tried to climb with me & I got in a short round punch to his pleasure. His belly was like a bag of dough. He gasped, tried to clutch me & close, & hit ^{me} ^{again} the same place.

After that it was just murder, & I felt like murder. He ^{remained} ^{standing} a few feet away then I ^{led} ^{expected}, his face ^{flashed} ^{blackly}. I ^{remembered} a few years ago of the way ^{had} ^{he} ^{should} be a marked man. I ^{remembered} a blow after blow, & my knuckles were bloody, both my blood & his. His mouth ^{was} ^{running} ^{blood}, & I had split his lip. Then I gave him a right to the chin, & he went down, & his head hit the floor.

He lay there, arms spread, well a touch out.

I looked a ^{hunch} at the door, & Bill's voice.

"Sun, - sun."

I took the bag from my pocket & went & unlocked the door ^{upon} ^{Bill's} ^{good} ^{face}. I ^{found} that he had heard the racket & ^{thought} ^I ^{was} ^{very} ^{bothered} ^{up}.

"All right, Bill. The gullies & I had a difference of opinion & I settled it."

"Sun so, sun."

He ^{grinned} & looked down at Howard. His chest & his belly were ^{beating} like a pair of bellows, but he was still cautious, & his face was a paler & blood ^{red}.

"Son of a gun I've enjoyed myself, Bill."

"Just look at your hands, son."

"Yes, knuckles a bit ^{shined}. - Well, Bill, you had better go ^{across} to 'The Meadows' & get two of his people to come down & take him home."

Bill went & I sat on my stool & waited for Howard to come round. The black ^{streak} of hair on his low forehead was ^{like} ^{blood}, & his ^{yellow} ^{eyes} ^{were} ^{smaller} ^{bladder}. I saw his back open a ^{close}. He ^{groaned}. His ^{eyes} ^{opened}. They were ^{more} ^{white}.

I said - "Better be still, Howard. I have sent for some of your people to take you home."

He said nothing. He touched his head & spat blood out on the floor, & I saw a tool among the blood.
Then, I don't know why, but I felt another presence. I glanced toward the studio doorway & saw her standing there. She looked as though you were invisible. I could not have put it into words.

I spoke to her.

"The place for you, darling, go back to the house. I'll be with you in a minute." I mean - our house. - I lay on my back to the other place."

She must have seen my back.

"Oh, - your back - 'Robert'!"

"That's the result of hitting something. Go back to our house." She gave me a strange smile & went.

Not a word as yet from the thing on the floor. I sat & watched him, & I felt that somehow or through he was the best could still be done.

I said - "Take this to heart, Howard. Do your own thing about with my or her affair. - Do you hear?"

He closed one of his eyes & I saw a frown on his face.

"Cut that out, - your own thing about."

But he went on cursing & spitting & knowing until two his mother arrived with Bill. I lay looking at him, & I think I saw satisfaction in their faces.

"Your boys had better help him home."

One of them grinned at me.

"Yes, sir. Your sons have broken the game pot."

And that was that.

I found S. & Betty in the parlor, & it seemed to me that these two women understood each other & had become friends all in five minutes. Miss Betty had been busy. I saw a basin of hot water on a coffee stool, a bit of brown wool & a bandage laid out on a clean towel. She looked at my back, & she looked at my face & her smile was a keen smile.

"By your good back, sir. Shall I say of the doctor."

S. replied.

"I think he may be needed somewhere else."

Then, Betty whisked down out of the room, & I was alone with S. & S. & I looked at each other, & there was something in her eyes which I could not translate.

"Where did the good child get all this?"

"I don't know."

She made a movement with one of her hands, & I sat & stood

by the stool. She dipped a finger into the water to test its temperature, & pulled a wad of wool from the roll. She was looking at my hands. I put the right hand on the basin, & she dipped the wool in the water & very gently & paged the blood away. It aching for my knuckles was shielded. I must have smiled, & she gave a slight quiver to mine.

"It hurts." "I'm so sorry."

"Oh - nothing. - I never felt better in my life."

"You must have a doctor, & have them properly dressed."

"I am not worrying, my dear, nor must you."

She was silent, & I thought of Santa & Solder. Solder had wanted Santa's word, but it had been far more serious than Solder's. Betty had left a pair of scissors on the table, & Solder cut across my hand & laid them on the back of my hand. She took the bridge, & was musing it round my hand, when I happened to glance at her face, & was shocked & profoundly moved by what I saw. I saw was twinkling down her cheek.

"Darling, your mail eye. - What is it?"

She was looking at my right hand, & I put my left up to her shoulder.

"But you know that you are not going back to that damned house?"

She gave me a wet & pathetic look.

"It's my job."

"What? - Do you think I am going to let you go back there?"

"You are staying here until we find out something."

I drew her to me & kissed her forehead, & she put her head & let it rest against mine. She was sobbing now, & her hands were motionless.

"How can I?"

"Good God, - because I want you & I have never wanted anyone like I."

I felt her shaking.

"What did he - tell you?"

"He said what you might expect from a cold like that. - And I beat the heart out of him."

"Did you - believe it?"

I am afraid I forgot all about my hand. I put my arm round her, & held her close.

"But we cannot word of it. - Solder, will you marry me?"

She turned her face against mine, & her tears were wet on my cheek.

"I can't, not yet."

"Darling, - let it come. - You know - I can understand all that you have been through."

She ~~clung~~ ^{clung} to me.

"One good - real? - It - it doesn't seem possible. - I - I've been so lonely, so hard."

"Well, - my sweet, - that's all going to be in the past. - And here is an idea. You can go down & join the child. - I'll take you down. I suppose you could stay at the Poyeth's?"

She was just like a ^{rather hysterical} ~~rough~~ child.

"I could. - But all of this are over there."

"I'll deal with that."

"And - and -"

"That much filthy money? - My dear, can't you let me be responsible?"

And suddenly he himself was.

"Oh, - I'm forgetting all about your dear hands."

Bill & I took Betty with us, for a woman knows more about another woman's stuff than a man can, & with Betty with us there was her likelihood of their being a rough house, though, for what I had seen of the faces of the two sinister Horrocks' which had caused them more of their sorrow. I say the hell, & one of the same matter appeared, & he grinned at me.

"We don't come to collect from Malloy's thing. You can show us her room."

He was cheerful & confident. He trotted up the stairs & back of us, & showed us her room. It was uncluttered, & we went in it about that most strange job. I told Bill to stay at the top of the stairs as a watch dog, while Betty opened doors, & I found that some old Podelyter sat on the bed. Her belongings were pathetically few, & it moved me to be - the room of hers. Betty Betty's comfortable & clean little hands dealt with these intimate details. The suitcase accepted all of them save a cheap, shabby four-cent wheel I stay away from.

"So it's all, Betty?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, my dear. One is glad of someone like you at a time such as this."

She was silent - but smiling. And then she said - "It's easy to do this for you, sir."

I told Betty that Mrs. Malloy would be staying with us for a day or two, & asked her to get the Queen Room ready. I again told Betty & Betty must have begun to suspect that

Lydia Hartfield might be a dose of reason, & I wondered how they would react to my charge, but that was all in the future. Betty was a warm-hearted little creature, a Ball, a reliable soul who did not cultivate guile or class-spirit. Like the Puritans they both loved children & was - I knew - redoubtably kind to a child had come to this. So, what of Peter? That little fuddled fellow might prove to be an appeal.

I found Solder sitting in a high-backed Jacobean chair in the parlour. I closed the door, & when I saw his face I knew that our errand was not over.

I said - "Wyllth is reborn. - I say are getting you even ready?"

She looked at him as an true & dignified young man.

"I am easier now. I wait you to tell me - what he said to you."

"You will carry him for, cheap cost, & I had it across the back of a chair. Solder."

"I'll tell him, - I'll tell him. - I don't think he will repeat these lies."

I went & stood close to her. Somehow I could not bear the stark, frozen face she showed me.

She said - "How can I give - wyllth - to you? It cannot be proved, & that leaves me - cold & bitter."

I said - "Solder, I believe I will believe wyllth you care to tell me. - And why? - Well, of dear. Because - somehow - I know what is true, & I will go to the stake for it. - For God's sake don't be hard with me."

She gave me a strange, agonised look, & suddenly she fell on her knees, & clasped me.

"Oh, - bless you, - my son, bless you."

Profoundly moved, I put my arm about her & lifted her up. I kissed her on the forehead.

"I am's of pledge. Let it live in your heart."

(After 138)

Worst I've met since the melodrama, but it was not melodrama to me. I made myself out still in that lovely old room of his, for I wanted to run back to the studio. Strange, - but I was afraid for his sake, a very little for my own. I seemed to know that there would be a shock down between them, & that that great big heart was day now, & night hurt him. Believe it or not, but I saw a couple of old women laying around in a well, & I had to keep myself from taking any of them & going back to the studio. I felt that if he had sent my Dan I could slink in face to place.

An old grandfather clock stood in a corner ticking steadily. It was a rather old clock, & its dead beats were not like mine. I watched it dash. Five minutes, ten minutes, & still the damnable rapture. I just could not bear it any longer.

I ran into the good Bill in the hall, & he grinned at me.

"It's all right, madam."

I made for the studio, & even as my life did I see a thing that seemed so good to me. The heart was just a bloody mess on the floor, & Dan ^{was} stuck there - motionless. I ^{was} afraid I let go.

"Oh, - Dan, oh - my man -!"

He held me.

"No place for you, darling. Go back & wait."

I ran I saw his back, & ^{shivered} & ^{bleeding}.

"Oh - you poor back!"

And he laughed.

"I don't think that ^{thing} will try any more foul tricks on me."

But I wanted to know.

"What did he say to you?"

"Forget it. A pretty collection of him. - I don't think I have ever enjoyed myself so ^{as this} in all my life."

What a man!

I went back to the house, & when Betty came to me I was flabbergasted.

Yes, he had said other dear things to me which were sacred, & not to be put down as jokes.

XXI

The controversy now is ^{so packed with} full of peculiar & personal problems, & the social revolution no small matter, that a man - if such a creature exists, - my friend being such a torn & almost incoherent among the gods & passions. I suppose it would now have occurred to a Victorian bachelor that he ought here to choose between making the lady of his choice or leaving her - or too devoted stuff. Should he put in the for tail coat & the buttonhole, or be reduced to wearing the apron, or remain celibate & retain domestic comfort? To begin with make such a man of his social adaptation. He misses the car, the airplane & the wireless, & behaves like some creature little exhibited, having a two target about the house. I am afraid that if I did face domestic problems I did not take them very seriously for just my father's wife for the dual parts of cook & housemaid, while I played battles & general staff. But, what of it? He said both you & I ^{of domestication} ^{amidst} a not too poor old relic of a dead culture ^{amidst} ^{amidst} a world.

But this is a digression, really forced like a bucket of rope over the head of Hercules. I am sure he knows a woman who is domestic & domestic, but when I have my early next morning I saw Betty go to the door of the Queen's Chamber with a tray of early morning tea.

I blessed Betty. I walked the way to the hall.

I said - "Betty, my dear, put a mantel. I'm being laid to, because you will be being laid to me. I don't know whether that counts with you, but I do rather value you & Bill."

She smiled up at me & me.

"Well, I don't forget anything, sir."

"What's that, Betty?"

"But for you I might not have had Bill."

I don't care to the machine that in the main - the good things are my do continue on the credit side, & that though I haven't been a genius for forgetting, all is not forgotten & not by anybody. I should I met at breakfast, & what a strange meal it was, the - remain a soft topped & young lady, &

a magnificent Peter to me, & met the tough & head ^{young} woman who had to fight a fight alone against such that in nature in man. I stood & stood when she had come into the room, & somehow & without hesitation she had taken the same side of the gate-legged table.

"Is it right?"

"Saccharin - I'm afraid. Betty does so much better a thing."

"She poured out of coffee."

"How do you ~~small~~ milk - for coffee."

"That is a privileged question. I haven't got parents. Do you know what Betty says?"

"She's a smart thing, Betty."

"And haven't. Well, Betty's remark is that the Saccharins are ~~turning~~ into a matter of strategy."

"Because everybody has to do it - or be left out without?"

"Healthy."

"I saw her look at my hands."

"all right" "You must go & see what about your hands."

"I will. We'll drive into Abbotsbridge & see of friend Sam. And we can visit the Pagelby, a friend of mine. By the way - how did Queen Bee's chamber please you?"

"She looked at the coffee-pot."

"Some room - new full of happy healthy."

"And that is what I want for you, of course, always & everywhere."

"She gave me a look while I shall always remember."

After breakfast & half a pipe I got the car out & we started for ~~down~~ to Abbotsbridge, ~~a very charming town~~ I saw her glance at the gate of "The Meadows" & it was a kind of swift, flicking interest, half frightened stare. It touched me all the time so when I felt her elbow beside me, ~~her hand~~ ^{her hand} lay restfully in her lap. - Yes, life must have been pretty healthy for her own garden, with nothing between her & the Howood would but a tough & flippant criticism. Her heart must have been a perfect all-time, her perfect front to rough & howling, & her heart had the same quality of fortification, which ~~can~~ ^{can} be no rare. There is such fullness in her hair & the world which is but skin-deep, & how much who look like an angel can behave like a Purple Poll.

He did not say much to each other on this drive, & there is something more respects the intimate chatter, the intimacy of a dinner table with two people feel that they have been together.

At Doris's again I saw her glancing at my hands. The quality of that look gave me a muscular thrill. These hands of mine had been hurt in her service, & I - as man - had managed to convince her that as man I was ~~adequate~~ adequate.

I drove first to Sam Baker's home, & leaving Soulda in the car, rang the bell. It was early, & Sam was ~~not~~ in the nursery, & when I went down into his study room he came in & gave me a blue-eyed grin. He was a stocky & lovable fellow, with a ~~believe~~ a genuine Texas & acceptance of the 'good days' for my big job. I knew well as man about Sam, & his behavior was admirable.

"Ha, ha, my lad, - I was wondering whether you might be needing a little attention."

"Just - why?"

"Oh, well, I was called last night to the other gentlemen, & I heard a story."

He grinned at each other.

"I took the skin off my knuckle."

"Well, you made a nice mess of him, or rather - a very nice mess."

"Yes, of a very nasty fellow."

He nodded at me.

"Diagnosis accurate - I should say. Come into the nursery & I'll clean you up."

Along other things he told me that I had broken Howard's lower jaw. And did I expect to be sued for damages? He was in a laughing mood, but he'd be joking. I should see the Fyffe, Man. Doctor should be kept with records, if those records showed to be right, & I knew that the man who was attending to my hands must be wondering about repairs & repairs. And so I told him, as man to man.

"Well, what would you have done, Sam."

"Baker told his girl - if possible. Nice neighbors to have."

"Yes. That is one of my problems."

When Sam he had finished the job I asked him to come out & meet the woman I hoped to marry. Soulda was sitting there watching the Abbotts' traffic, & for a moment she did not see us, & I tapped at the car window.

"Soulda, - Here is Dr. Baker. I'd like you to meet him."

She turned. She looked startled & defensive, & then she smiled. Sam had walked round the car to the window, & his eyes were maliciously kind.

2

"(Miss Brenda Malloy, (Dr. Samuel Baber.))

He gave me a quizzical look.

"I am rather satisfied. - Samuel - far too! - Do I look like a Samuel?"

She gave him her hand.

"No, - not quite a Samuel."
he laughed.

At the Abbot's badge post-office we sent a wire with the reply prepaid to the Poyellys, & then I managed to ring up the "Up & Little." Could they put me up again for a few days. I was asked to hold on, - then Dr. Malloy himself came to the phone. I was to be lucky. A reservation for a single room had just been cancelled, & they could take me on the Sunday. I asked him to come back to the car & I joined him & told him that I had been lucky fortunate.

Did he want to do any shopping? Apparently he did not. Then, would he like a drive, somewhere up in the Downs where the world was at peace?

"I'd love it."

So, I took him through Mickleham, & up the steep lane behind Box Hill. We passed Meredith's house, & high up on the Mickleham Downs I pulled the car on to a grass verge, got out & opened her door. I knew the spot very well. The old agency of St. Paul's Street could be traced on a green bank not far away.

I gave her a hand & helped her out, & her hand seemed to rest happily in mine. We found the old trackway, & sat down under a hedge, & she had her still in mine.

"I like it." Set's not a dream of the people who passed the way. Soldiers, marchers, weary, full of care, lacking any landmarks. But old days, of dear, when Britain knew peace for some three hundred years.

She sat there looking at the landscape.

"Somehow - I can feel that peace."

"Can you, Brenda? - I'm all in good."

She turned her head & smiled at me.

"How good, when other things are good."

When we had sat awhile, looking out upon the English landscape, so still & serene under a green sky, we got up & walked along the short way of the old Roman road. I put an arm about her. He was like two young lovers, said a

boy in that first phase of happy excitement, when even a little happy cry of the other. I saw all the wonder, an almost childish wonder in me that someone felt such a desire. It was sufficient for me to touch him about usually a look at him as at something infinitely precious. Already I seemed to discern a change in him; he looked younger, more joyful, less aimed against life.

A new thought came to me. I found myself considering modern love as it is popularly rendered on the screen, the idea being the dream as though he would leave no life left to him, & was ready for every day. And I laughed.

She glanced up at me questioning. "Of - lighter?" I passed, & turned her gaze to me, & smiled her forehead.

"That's why."

I then looked at me like Rita.

"And why -?"

"That's a film relation, - darling. - I feel rather like a head in a machine play."

She looked straight into my eyes.

"I feel you - for being - you."

We found a nice little flat for us from the Poyellys. They could take Salka, & Rita went by love. So, we could travel on the Saturday. It could not be by car, for I had not enough petrol, & I wondered whether we could find seats on the train. I told Salka I would not ask a new what I could do. Would she care to come? She said she would, & do some shopping.

We went. She took a taxi to Oxford Street - where I dropped her, & drove on to Paddington. We were to meet at my club for lunch. Paddington looked like a mad-house with really with a lovely crowd, but at the reservation office I was lucky. I was offered two corner seats in a non-smoker.

I was feeling gay even in the face of the rather grim little clerk who attended to me. He was efficient & richly polite, & when I paid him I placed a rather half crown on the counter.

"Thank you for constant service."

He glanced at me & checked the coin with a ^{catching} clay into the till. So, I - a snob - had dined against aggressive class-consciousness. Was it that he did not like half-crown or the gentleman who looked too much a gentleman? Just clear? I wondered. Perhaps such gentlemen were out of place in his house now would.

I sent a note to Dorothy, asking her to arrange for a ^{car} to meet us at Tenno, & then, regretted the advantage of going for a taxi. No car today, no delay though the roof, no doubt, little car to share it of the, no ordinary old back for Botticelli's girl with a brown hair. She could wear such the name, but knew more plentiful - I reached my club to find I could with in the house with a brown paper parcel as she knew.

"Auch, - dear?"

"Sally for Rita?"

"Good. I'll put that in the office for you. Oh, I've got treats. What about a little drink?"

Fred the Barman in his clean white coat, smiled at us both. He sat on a stool, & so far as he was concerned - on the right side of the bar. I raised my glass to him, & gave him a look that should have been sufficient.

He smiled, had coffee & a round and a matter, & I was feeling proud of my partner. She was wearing the same frock she had worn at Paddington, but her face was not the face of not a dreamy Jane.

"I said - 'I saw a little adventure in the air. Do you mind?'"

"I right."

"Be - municipal, got to please poor man."

She smiled at me.

"That might be both easy & difficult."

The commission collected a thin for us, & I told the man to show us to Shelton in Duke Street. I had a wad of money on me. When we arrived, & I opened the door for him, he looked at the Shelton window, & then at me. I nodded at him, & passed off the driver.

"Rather a good place - that."

She hesitated.

"Don't you -?"

"It's a happy day."

She gave me a soft, contented look, & I opened the shop door for her.

Mr. Shelton bowed us in. He produced a bag of rings.

"I said 'he'll both choose a ring if we agree.'"

By choice you decide a number in a antique setting, she - a small ring in this at half the price of the one I favored.

"This one, - Robert, please."

She gave me a flashing look, & I had to know her.

There are days when the delight of happening seems more vivid & to possess a quite mystical significance. I recall now the day when we travelled together down to Cornwall. He had lunch & tea on the train, & I was as proud as Santa of the Sordida who sat opposite me. She had a brocade bag with her which travelled from carriage to restaurant car, & at last it lay propped against the window. I pretended to admire it. I picked it up & then - well I studied about - I studied it on my lap. I had an envelope ready in my pocket & I slipped the envelope into the bag. She was looking out of the window, & I said that she reached the track I was playing.

Idea Irma, I found a car, a ^{Harry} Harry Jerry, & all that mycel Carmel, & one, St. Gout in Rochdale. What a name, & what an way, & what a name beside me.

I still go to drive down the steep lane to the Payell's college. I now hold Sordida's hand. We saw the white college & the white fence & the grey little garden, & a child waiting at a gate. ~~Waiter~~.

Sordida was out of the car before I was, & I felt it ^{to be} her right.

"Darling -!"

"Oh, - my."

She was picked up a hand. And then I saw her little freckled face smile at me as her mother's shoulder.

"Let's go with you."

She was just down, Has now came out to me, & I gathered her up, & she gave me a wincing hand.

"I only go being with mother. - And aren't you a thing?"

I hurried to go & looked at Sordida.

"Now isn't it that a nice thing for a man to leave from the lips of a lady?"

And the mother laughed, & I think it was the first time such laughter had come from her.

(After 11.0.)

I was worried about his poor hands. - I did what I could, but I made him come with me & see his doctor.

I am to stay at Hatfield for a night or two, & then I am to go to St. Albans. I shall have a little money put away, & I can manage for a while.

He & Betty went across to "The Meadows" & collected my things. He would not let me go even the place again. Two of Howwood's fellows had to come & help carry him back to the home. - And he thought Dan was a king. What a lovely job!

We found the doctor in. As a matter of fact he had just back from "The Meadows." I had rung him up, & said Howwood had had an accident.

Accident! - Dan & I Sam had a good laugh over it. I like Dr. Sam Baker. - So Dan had broken the heart's joint! Oh, yes! And there are no four broken in his hands, just a small a small knuckle. He will have to keep them dressed for a day or two, he bought some dressings & Band-Aids at Boots.

He was lucky too over the telephone. The Pinnels can take him. He sent a very kind note to the Pinnells.

"Want to stop, Harold?"

I did not. I wanted to save my money.

"Like to drive to some peaceful spot?"

"I should."

He drove me up to the Downs above Mickleton, & parked the car in the grass. He said he was looking for the old Roman Road which could be seen here as a broad grass bank. He called it the age. We walked about, holding hands, & when we found the grave of that Roman road we sat down in the grass under a hedge, & I removed one of his bandages & his leg. It was a very lovely & remote place, & as we sat there together a great feeling of peace came to me. Some fell of women & about children's voices at the bottom of the hill. Landscapes & the system of good & evil. For today all was utterly good.

I heard his laugh, & I turned my face. Why laughter? He turned me on the forehead.

"That's a fine sight, darling. I feel rather like a kid in a miracle play."

(Continue after 140)

Space.

The Pagelby can take me. Peter & I can share a room.

I feel as though I was going about in a dream, & what a comical idea to go about with. It is all so new to me, this country & civilization & business. May I go on dreaming like this.

He took me up to London. He looked at his club, or our club as he called it. Then, that dinner in a Tavern, & the looking playful & significant. A jeweller, & a ring. Oh, my dear, now there was a more sweet, sentimental program! And I loved every moment of it.

He wanted to give me a most expensive ring. No, my dear, any ring you give me will be sufficiently precious. I chose a much simpler thing.

Paddington Station, & what a different Paddington! I still felt that I was living in a dream. And very true I met this man there was a lower smile in them.

Then I saw, & a car, & the ferry, the water, & all that magical Painted scene. He told me that this was the country of Britain & Ireland. "Your country, my dear." It was a Roadside. And what a name, & what an evening, & what a man beside me!

He drove down the steep lane, & I saw the child at the little white gate. I was out of the car before him. Peter was some way off me.

Then he looked over my shoulder.

"Oh, it's Uncle Bob."

I put her down & he picked her up, & her arm went round his neck.

"Fare you best with mummy. And will you stay."

I laughed, & such laughter was new to me.

XX

Three halcyon days ^{were} spent by the three of us in impossible
 joy-making. Joe did ^{not} ~~not~~ around, - Peter took us for a cruise
 in his boat, - Peter - I flirted. I was Uncle Bob to her, &
 I was wondering how she would accept me in a more intimate
 relationship.

I & the mother had a ^{last} ^{date} that ^{was} ^{more} ^{our} ^{first} ^{approach}
 ground. We had climbed up to the Parterre, & were sitting on the
 grass when she produced a letter, from the ^{bottom} ^{of} ^{her} ^{purse}.
 She spoke to the child.

"Peter, dear, go & pick some flowers."

When the child had gone, her mother passed me the envelope
 which I had slipped into her bag.

"Please take this back."

"Why should I?"

"Please. - I'm not for sale."

That roused me.

"Good God, - you ought to know by now -"

"I do know."

"By dear, - don't hurt me."

She put out a quick hand.

"Don't it hurt you to take -"

"It does."

"Well, - let's make a bargain."

"Need we?"

"Yes. I'll keep this - until -"

"Until what?"

"Never mind. Or, wait, - Robert."

She slipped the envelope back into her bag.

I introduced Snodden to the Marshes before I left
 for home. In fact she & the Marshes dined with me
 on my first, & Snodden & Mrs Marsh ^{very} ^{kind} ^{sympathetic}
 each other about for the first I knew. Both were so
 comely that neither needed the favour of the other, & both were
 women of such fine temperament that sympathy was easy between
 them. Both had a substantial background, & each of them was the

mother of a child. The Polish girl with her long hair, ^{her} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~her~~ ^{her} ~~front~~ ^{front} ~~face~~ ^{face} ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~more~~ ^{more} ~~negatives~~ ^{negatives} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~both~~ ^{both} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~us~~ ^{us} ~~than~~ ^{than} ~~expected~~ ^{expected}.

[illegible]

But neither was with me a little journey. It was high time that I got back into harness & attended to the financial aspects of my two in one world. I had two good luck-watching partners to get the job done, Cary Mallaby & Paul Sanchez Millmans. My first choice would be Cary Mallaby, copalant, comfortable, a ^{reluctant} ~~solid~~ was a middle aged kind of twenty & began Hebrew inches.

I say, Howard & I. Meadows. How could one tell the
 country of such a neighbor, a fellow who would pour fire
 over any woman who refused his favors. I am afraid I am
 not unmodern in my make-up. The gals, smart, independent
 ladies of the new world who reverence nothing but their own
 cynical notions have me gazing like some fool boy. I do
 not like cold, put, seeing you gentlemen to what a kind of
 intellectual Southern in the North compare to him, my dear, as I
 sat & contemplated the Howard problem I could picture
 the alert & prominent you smiling at me. Had I not been
 about in the world? Did I not know my Buda &
 Vienna, Paris, & Praha, & right chills, & the rather nice men
 under crowded dance-floor. The mark of the cock-tail
 bar! Was I such a dope as to believe that any woman
 who had known that would believe in instant & fortuitous,
 & had any idea higher than a pair of new silk stockings? Well,
 I was the root of fool, & wanted the credulous are wiser
 than the cynic.

But - H. Diamond? If Houtfield was to be our house, I will
a lovely little thing like the "Pheasant" was more like a signpost. It would have to be
spaced off the white. But - how?

(After 142)

Three lovely days.

He was sitting in the grass below the Castle when I spoke to him of the money he had slipped into my bag. I had sent Rita to pick flowers. I had the money ready in the same envelope, & I asked him to take it back.

He did not want to, & I blurted out a silly protest, & said I was not for sale.

That hurt him; & he asked if I had not yet realized that he was not that sort of cad.

So, I took the money back & said I would keep it on that.

We dined with the Mancos. I took to them both, & particularly to her. He has the America's vitality & drive, & my America's blood & his Polish seem to mine, & we share the Continental flavors of ^{our} tenants. She is kind & easily & forgiving, & she has a child. I feel that I can make a friend of Mrs. Mancos, & I may need a friend if my plan for the next few months takes shape.

I talked to Don of what I called our "Santabale", & he understood me.

It is not that I want to leave him, but myself.

One can run into happiness, to or avoid to it with a kind of secret assurance, like climbing the Scala Santa at Rome.

Bill met me at Abbot's bridge, & I was glad of Bill. Like some fresh-faced countryman he expressed other wishes, some of the simpler virtues of the wholesome human soul. I was back on my beloved Snay, a Snay that is still described by those who do not know it as a "stockfish's paradise".

"Shall I drive, sir?"

"No, Bill."

I saw his glance at my back. I had shed the bandage two days ago.

"Any more, Bill?"

He grinned at me.

"I say, the gent. is still a' bed."

"And how is he?"

"But of a sleep, sir, - if you wish me. - Best work and they're had, sir."

"I'm not shedding tears over that."

Hartfield was more, given & gracious & memorable. The old house had a new look for me. She had kept her, & the perfume of her feet was heard to pervade it.

After dinner I sat down & wrote to Lady Mallaby. She & Sir Theodore had been the fifteen miles away in an old Georgian house at the foot of the Downs. I apologized for the delay & told her that if she still wished me to find her father the pleasure would be mine. I could do the work at Hartfield, or come to her if she preferred it. I went out & posted the letter, & as my back I strolled through the gate of The Museum. Not a car, & not a soul to be seen in the garden. No trace from the box. I began to wonder whether the house would die of inattention.

I received two letters on that particular morning, & one of them was a registered letter from St. James.

I opened it, & found my envelope & the note I had slipped into the bag.

"Robert - my dearest"

This is a gesture what I wish to make. - Perhaps you will understand.

I have a job.

I can find the mistake.

Bitte sende you a line - that is not in the check. Mine is like him.

Shall be "

So, she had a job! - What kind of job? And why this query?
I was puzzled & yet somehow pleased. I liked & loved the
spirit of her. I felt those first fond mother needs & wishes to
be gratified.

The other letter was from Lady Mallaby. It was the best of a comely wife, fairly ^{strong} & ^{powerful}. She would drive over to see me on the Friday, & I could paint an old friend's face, & coat the hypodermic. For, Lady Sarah was the one person whom it would be a pleasure to paint in my mood of the moment.

Singing away off about lunch time. Could he come down on the Sunday? He could, & very much so. I had a story to tell singing Slender.

On the Friday early Sarah arrived about eleven in the morning with a woman chaffeur driving the Roller. I was sitting in the garden, & I went to meet her as she would call across the grass. She was about five feet high, & immensely fat, & an ^{essential} ~~immense~~ hindbrain radiated from her handsome old face. She had been a very good friend to me in my early days, & we could time each other like girl & boy.

"I've brought back with me, I can."

She had ^{just} called on Sam. & I kissed her.

"Not so I wish these days."

She gave me a sallying look.

"So that is?" Do stubborn bachelors ever repent?
 I hope so.

2 layked.

As a matter of fact - they do.

" How exciting! I bet you get."

Not quite. And I'm not quite so excited as I was.

" To me you are even executed?"

"Will you not?"

"Perhaps there were participations."

The dog drove around with a considerable hagen, & I stood it from him.

"Rather capricious - for two?"

"A few letters in it."

There were. I never knew a woman who left so much behind her in the spirit & the flesh. She travelled & possessed a farm; & they have many families in the U. S. A. & the Colonies. I know of her going into a lay chair; & then delivered the baby into Betty's hands. We opened it. A child; a large egg, a tin of

Span, new butter, a pound full of fine flour.

"Betsy, you say."

"I said -" I presume you can produce a lunch for the lady, Betsy."

"Can I not?" said she.

Spot is an hour's work before lunch, a good way over every Sunday. She was so much a person in face & figure & temperament that it was like painting a character out of Dickens. There have been occasions when and a colorless rather than so far that I have felt faint about the business, & gone off on my own - so to speak - & produced a strange edition of a very dull book. The lady looked ^{had} ~~disappointed~~ ^{delighted} with the illustration, but I rather fancy that never either - with no capitalizing anything in it - would have cleared me among the commercial buyers.

We talked. I alluded forward rather to talk, & as a matter of fact it would have required an avalanche to submerge Lady Sarah in silence. She had observed "The Meadows", & was interested. She was like a big & healthy child in her conversation.

"Rather useful, I am, as an emergency eating-house."

I saw no reason why I should not tell her about Dan Harold Howard & his home, & I did so, - but kept Sarah out of the picture.

"What a lovely person, my dear. That may mean for you will - that - about as you do it."

"Oh, well, I have had some satisfaction out of it."

"Good how?"

"We differed rather considerably upon a certain matter, & he came around to beat me up. - I enjoyed it. I believe he is still a fool."

Her eyes were crinkles of light.

"How lovely! - I wish I have been here, Dan. There are so many good fellows who don't get thanked."

I could divine other curiosity & how, for, as I have said she was as interested in life as a child outside a toyshop window. So, Mr Robert Wilson was proposing to wheel his library.

And who - what was the lady? - I could feel her curiosity
sitting in her feet & watching me, & it annoyed me. I did not
recall it. She was olive oil & butter in an acid & fatherly words.
But just forbidding. I held her off till the broken bread, &
then I showed her two portraits, Snolla - her child.

Many people had been fooled by Lady Sarah in labeling her
just a friend, ^{old} I was, but I was sure as to the plan for
this. She was an expert painter, & no woman had a sharper
eye for a picture - in imitation. I found grief in clearing up
some trouble while she viewed those two portraits.

"Excellent, Dan. You must have been in the mood."

"I was."

"Sentiment - involved?"

"Rather no. - I hope to persuade her to marry me."

She turned her head, quizzical eyes on me.

"The child is included."

"I hope so."

"She looks a lovely little thing."

"She is." - "And the daughter of the mother?"

"Very much so."

She was silent for a moment.

"A widow. - Well, of course, - there is something to be
said - for experience. May I know her name?"

"Snolla Mallory."

"How Arthurian! - You must bring them both to see me
some day."

I made her a little bow.

"Thank you, - Lady Sarah. - You are rather good for
people who need confidence & kindness. - She has needed
both."

And I armed her across the garden & in to lunch.

Jimmy came down by car on the Sunday, & he was not his
usual himself. Some promoter fellow who was to have
stayed in next night had played a trick on him, & James was
not a man to forgive trickery.

"Good. - I must to this something."

How little did we guess that the chase was to be his own!

He had dinner in car round to the back of the house, &
we sat on the lawn - I told him about Horwood, & he

Simon

Simon began to come back. And what had been the provocation?
 I hesitated, & then I told him.

He grinned at me, & put out a big paw.

"Good! - I must smoke half a pipe in the car. - See you, I've left it in the car."

We strolled off, whistling, and had he gone ten seconds when two figures appeared round the corner of the wall, Howard & a friend. I sat up. Our friend the stage gentleman's face was revealing. I have never seen a more theatrical look before. His words were stopped, & when he spoke his voice seemed to rattle.

"Good morning, Mr. Ryan. - I have a friend here who is dying to meet you."

I got on my feet, & looked into the grey eyes of that professional slogger. -

"Definitely - I'm never. The better the day the better the dead"

I was sure to be no gallant preliminary. Mr. Phy Ugh came sailing at me like a bull at a gate, & the driver a sudden a stage elge car was in front. I saw a black and white shadow - he did. His face fell. He stood & stared.

I turned & saw Simon.

I said - "Oh - Good, let me introduce Mr. Harold Howard & a friend. I gather that the friend is here to do what Mr. Howard failed to do. And - oh - a Sledge too!"

Simon could only stare the man. He was grinning. He addressed Mr. Phy Ugh.

"Good morning, Bunch. Have it out for a day two, have we? I'm just like punchy a sack of fiddle. Put it on the row the fellow's giving face, & the propitiously aimed at it."

"I've no quarrel with you, Mr. Slogger."

"Is that so? Well - I'm day the grandly."

And Simon sailed into him.

There was no fight with the fellow. He just tried to dodge or block Simon's blows. I walked up to Howard.

"Decisions of your, Howard. - I can't say well had you again, - but I shall see back."

He looked away & said a word. I said a little word of mine. Meanwhile, Simon had floored Mr. Phy Ugh, & the fellow was sitting in the car, holding his jaw.

"That, Simon. - I think we ought take this business up with the police. Suppose a attempted assault."

Sami laughed.
 "Need we?" - got up, Back. Only a minute or so ago I was
 telling Mr. Ryan ^{that} I wanted to kick ~~Sammy~~ "you are just it
 for him."
 The fellow started crawling away from me, then labored up & started
 a charge run. Sami was after him like a dog after a cat. I
 saw him by seeing his foot make contact. Ryan could hear the
 thud. The people seemed so nervous to me that I did the
 same to Howard. In fact we propelled both these blockheads
 to the gate & that kept a number of men further, & then stood
 with our arms linked, watching the men for the freedom. Mr. Poley
 Ugly was holding his backside.

Another letter from Snolla.

She tells me that she is happy in her new job, but she does not tell me what it is. Now - why? About I can divine a Balthazar smile, graceful & a little mysterious, in her reticence.

I find myself going from past to present, & vice versa, but in my next letter to her I do not wish her to be more explicit, perhaps because I suspect of stretched ply-fish. Or is she pathic due to the proof?

Say Sarah is with me any other day. I catch her regarding me with a kind of whimsical curiosity. Now - why? Is there something about me which moves her to kind & secret laughter? Am I - the notable bachelor who has been somewhat pursued & pursued, rather pining to be in the passer?

Her portrait was going well, & was pleasing me, but as yet I had not asked Sarah for her opinion, but on the fourth day I did so.

"Is it - pleasing to you?"

He was engaging & attentive, & sat on the sofa, & smoked a cigarette, & there was mischief in her very expression.

"I rather think, dear Sam, that there is a new subtlety in your ~~new~~ method."

"New method? - I'm afraid I'm not curious of getting very new."

"Oh - sweet innocence!"

Her eyes were roving, & I took her seriously.

"Just exactly - as you suggested."

"A new approach, of dear?"

"To what?"

"The extreme innocence of woman."

I had hit a pipe. I walked across & looked at my work. Was there any number in my method? Sarah - I - as a craftsman should know? Well, perhaps the few I now had scarcely more opinion about it, a kind of human, inward glow.

"Well, I'm just a little puzzled."

"Is the inspiration so subliminal?"

And then I that I began to see the light.

"You mean -?"

"From one point, of dear, like a man - in love - with life."

Perhaps I suppose I was.

Yes, perhaps I was.

I had found myself described by one of my contemporaries as "A miserable lout with a large front fall of blonde colour, whose form was more pleasing to women than the looks he made of them." But the gentleman who had lifted a natural leg over me, was one of those poor devils, who are angry with life because life is a woman, and passed their days on the other side. My Lady Sarah's dignified frown, about as much as the withered Bill brought down from the local pub.

"The Government's ~~was~~ like a bunch of bananas, I'd started life green, turned yellow, & all of them ^{are} ~~were~~ crushed."

But I could make fun at myself, even though I was puzzled & puzzled, because of it. Had I appeared so green to the world of women, a ~~man~~ man - his least exhibit a certain ripeness? And what was I to do about it, how to play a game of blind-man buff with me, & waiting for me to remove the bandage?

Secret

I too soon passed to play fables. When I had captured Lady Mervyn's portrait, I became conscious of a brief enthusiasm. I ran up St. Mervyn, & asked for Mervyn. It was Don Mervyn who answered me.

"Bob Byan speaking. I can also bother you. Could you put me up again for a few days?"

Did I divine a certain delay, hesitation & his reaction?

"One moment, please, Mr. Byan."

I waited.

"Hallo -"

"Byan."

"It will have to be The Sable Rocks. Could you mind?"

"Not a bit. - Sable will suit me."

I heard him laugh, & it was a rather lovely laugh, & I got the feeling - rather - that he was laughing at me & the my poor piece of periphrasis.

A girl's voice answered me.

"She's a Cattle. Who's that - please?"

"Mr. Robert Byan. Can I speak to Mr. Mervyn?"

"I'm afraid Mr. Mervyn's out, Mr. Byan."

"Is Mr. Mervyn in?"

"No, I'm afraid not. Can I help you?"

"You can. I'm wondering if you can put me up again for a few days."

"Hold on a moment, please."

I cannot say just why I sensed a certain ^{strange} hostility in the situation. I could hear a faint babble of voices as though some argument was in progress. I supposed that the office and a conference was a possible encounter. What it was I caught the last words of a conversation which slipped into the place, & which I was not expected to hear.

"All right. I'll tell him that."

"Hello?"

"Yes."

"It will have to be the Little Rock, Don Byers."

"Don't mind. - I shall be idle."

A pleasant giggle was the response to that poor piece of fearfully.

"We can take you on the Friday, Don Byers. Shall we arrange for a car to Fresno?"

"Please!"

September was a month that delighted me with its stillness & maturity. Like some gleamed river winding at will over the fields that bore signs of the golden grain. I had written to Arnold, warning him of a visit, & I will confess that I hoped to see him on the Fresno platform, but there was no Arnold either on the platform or in the waiting-car. Joe gave me a kind of whimsical look as though he was hiding a piece of humor of his sleeve.

"Hello, Joe, how's my body?"

"Fine, sir."

"Had a good season."

"So-so, sir. Nothing to grouse about."

"You are not much given to grouching, Joe."

"Nothing to grouse about, if it comes to that, sir."

It was one of those golden evenings which September lends to those who love her. He was the only car to cross the ferry, & the big woods & the water were glowing still. He chuffed away, & took the steep hill smoothly. I lay back & felt good. The Carmel country was the very background for my mood, & my content that night began had the pleasant promise of surprise. I ought I should know what Arnold's job was, & I could suppose that his work had kept him at St. Mary.

So, we came to the hill above the cattle & I saw the familiar scene spread below me, the walled water & the red hills & the woods, colonnades, glens, a profound peace.

The sea-part was about eight. He ^{down} had just the little house in the garden, the harbor & the white "Ship & Castle". He drew up outside "The Bell Rock" & the first person I saw was Dr. Macleay. He might have been waiting there for me, & his bright eyes seemed ~~more~~ brighter than usual. It was as though he had a joke to share with me.

He exchanged the very obvious remarks that can do on such occasions. The party collected by two entrances. I said Joe, & said good night to him.

"I am afraid we have had to put you in the top floor, Dr. Bygon. And it's a small room."

"No noise was heard. But ^{at} we are being rather formal."

He gave me a glancing smile.

"Reception is so important."

"So you. They don't always do it well in England."

I followed the porter upstairs. By now was at the end of a corridor, & its window was like the window of a ship with the sea below it.

"Will the door, sir?"

"Very much so."

He came in, & I stepped in & he closed the door.

That entry of mine was in the small room for a large man, & the wind vision might have been applied to it, but it was colorful, single & clear, & quite assured. I leaned out of the open window or thought to smell the rock & the sea & to reborn the heart of it all. I decided to speak before dinner. I could go up to the Poyells after dinner.

I was laying out a plan of the night program when I heard footsteps in the corridor. I came back.

"Come in."

The door opened, & a voice said - "Do you take early morning tea, sir?"

I nodded. I nodded in pale green uniform, clean, smiling & very much the chambermaid.

I sat down on the bed.

"Yes, please. Sir help put down too early."

"No, sir."

We looked at each other, & I saw the smile beginning in her eyes. I got up. I edged round the bed. I put my hand on her shoulder & drew her in, & with the other hand I closed the door.

"So - this - is you - got."

She looked straight into my eyes.

"Yes. - It is clear & good."

I nodded.

"And - dear -"

"Oh, - they were in a jam^{modeling} here. Two girls left^{modeling} - I - u -"

They have been so kind to me.

I put an arm round her. I drew her to the window;
"Don't imagine - this, a winter getting paid with^{one of the best} Bill, said
said. - I'll be your friend."

Her eyes were still as mine. She seemed to be looking right into me,
deep into me, - I think I understood.

"Still desiring to wear the ring?"

She said a bad, - I saw it on her finger.

"Do you wish me to keep it?"

"Do I wish you to keep it! - What is all this, - an experiment
in 'rebirth'?"

She touched my hair, - her eyes left mine.

"Do - celebrated artist^{confront} cannot will -"

I took her up.

"Charisma! - So the case the answer is my mind in the
affirmative. May I hear you, I would."

Her eyes came back to mine.

"Wait, - You hear anything - now -"

"I have a great deal more about grief - a woman - now I
met you. So, may I hear you?"

She put up her face to mine, - I held her close.

"Do you remember how you comforted me - that first day.
You held me a my shoulder.

"But you know why?"

"I think I can guess."

"I know more now. - Oh, my dear, - how I have wanted
to believe in 'dances'."

I buried her hair. Here was the one creature in the world for
me, - I creature whom I could never hurt.

I said - "Can I care of a new Peter personally?"

She lifted her face to mine.

"Yes. - I think - Peter -"

"Well, what?"

"You must be unhappy about - one having her."

"I shall not. Some people, a little like Peter make
life seem suitably good."

She clung to me for a moment.

"I must go now. I have the beds to turn down."

I looked a bit forgo.
 "May I say one thing?" I said you are the most friendly chambermaid I have ever seen -"
 She turned at the door, & there was living light in her eyes.
 "Shall you, sir. You shall have your tea perfectly at half past seven."

The Maids were dining in the hotel, & I asked if I might join them.
 "Oh yes."

I had seen Madame had & hired it, for there are certain books which should be hired, even though I caught a good many at another table nearby at me. I suppose that the card, pencil or bookish would old continue are there except for fantastic folk. I sat down & looked at the Maids, & they looked back at me, & one smile had other meanings. So had our conversation. It might have sounded muddled or meaningless to our neighbors.

"I hope you room in a year like it, Byron?"
 About I looked at her.

"Absolutely, & the service provided."

I gave Madame a little bow.

"And the service provided for other people."

"I wondered whether you would be shocked."

"I am. Delightfully so. - If only it is to come to me perfectly at seven o'clock. - I think it is rather unusual for some one to be served by her - betrothed."

She gave me a quivering look, "for the moment I felt in the water-bow."

"May I add, Madame, that I was ^{some} of the object of high decor. Hadn't it in back as does."

Had you smiled well by it.

"You are - rather a handsome person, Mr. Byron."

Again I gave her a little bow.

"Much less so than I used to think. There may be a certain ceremony - & the new future. - St. Paul & Pauline in the land of inevitable place. - Perhaps you will allow the after-celebration to happen here."

Madame's eyes were full of light, & the subsequent gesture was just like her eyes, sparkling. He called to the waiter.

"Pietro, - a bottle of the Vieux Clignac."

Chapman! I climbed the building of our neighbors. As to the ceremony that had passed it must have sounded to them like a crackling warren - & I a fellow who liked pedantic posing.

(After 154)

I told him in a letter that I had a job - but not what it was, & I could laugh to myself over the situation. In these chaotic years the pay for the job seems to be in inverse proportion to the experience he shall require. I agree included, my present occupation would probably produce for me an income double that of any culture & art & gay scientific. Don Driscoll is in the street, & we can laugh over it together. Perhaps

Don't run on such words, even the boring ones. A creative craft is less productive of drabness.

Well, well, well, he is coming to La Solle Rocha! I could hear Joan Driscoll in the office doing a delightful giggle over the news. Don's child - Joan, is incredibly romantic. He there was right after in The Vision of Balthus, but there would be no me in the story like my Don.

And what does Peter think of it all, especially of my child's art career? I answer, that God, there does not seem to be anything of the little man in Peter. She has gone out with Peter in his boat, & the sea is not so bad as stuff.

Don writes to me every day. He is at work again, a painting Lady Malloby. Will these great ladies accept me? Well, for his sake, I can cultivate decor.

He tells me about that Homewood incident & accepts it as a supreme gift. I do not. I have a feeling that the white is still dangerous. I don't know how far the Slaughter happened to be that. - I could hear him saying Slaughter.

And "The Meadows" appears to be a flop. Don what a blessing! As Don says - Hatfield & The Meadows are incompatible, & The Meadows will have to revert to the convention.

I am to have a home, my first home, & what a home! I go about saying to myself

He is coming today.

He is here.

He is in his room, unpacking.

I go & knock at his door.

"Come in."

I open the door.

(After 154 entered)

" Do you take any more tea, sir? "

He plays up for a moment, a look ^{see} the smile beginning
in his eyes. He gets up, draws me in & closes the door.

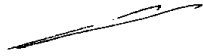
" So - this - is the job. "

I tell him how it all happened.

He says - " Don't mind me - this, a visitor getting fresh with
one of the staff. I like your French. "

He raises my hand & looks at the ring. He turns my hand, &
chuckles much.

After that gesture what it matters to me what we said to
each other?



St. Moore was idling in the ^{glow of that} September evening, ~~was~~ sitting at open door, or leaning on the sea-wall, or just strolling, with hands a sea spread for the breeze of moon. I had hit a pipe, & stood ~~was~~ leaning against the sea wall, with my back to it, a watch for Snodda. One or two old salts & blue jays passed the top of the wall with me, & I could feel the finality of this little place now that the cheer would have vanished.

I had asked Mrs. Moorely one last question.

"When does she - come off duty?"

"About half past eight, Mrs. Moorely."

Then I saw her. She came out by the way of the hotel entrance, still wearing her official frock, & carrying a little patterned bag. The evening twilight seemed to hit her hair at night. She paused, looked, and saw me, & smiled.

I went to meet her. I put out my hand for the bag.

"May I see your sea-bag?"

She let me take the bag, & we walked together to the steep steps beside the "Ship's Castle." I saw that St. Moore was watching us, with curiosity & perhaps with kindness, for Snodda was part of the watch wall, & so - in a sense - was I. St. Moore was when we climbed the steps & came to the steep lane that I reached that she was there, for there was a lantern in her movement. I wanted to put an arm round her, but somehow I was shy.

"I'm glad, darling?"

"Just a little."

She had been on her feet all day, & it had been a day of double duty. I discovered that later. I glanced at her shoes, & they looked rather old & worn.

"I'm glad people - the Moorelys."

"They have been loved to me."

"But you helped them in a corner."

"And it was help to me."

We were mounting the lane, & I could see the white cottages, & a child's head over a gate. She saw us, & waving the gate open, & came running, arms spread.

"Oh - Uncle Bob?"

I picked her up & kissed her on her little freckled nose.

"What a funny place to find me."

I laughed.

"Not adequate, say? How's that?"

She gave me a hearty one, & I turned & looked at her mother.

"Blame be the innocent. She'll have the lady worried some day.
I should wonder at no both."

"She ought to be in bed."

The Payells were sitting in the little garden, & I shall never forget the agreeable content of this Carmel couple. Peter gave Dolla his chair, & Rita climbed into his lap & gave me his own glass. We chatted for a while or so, & then May Payell got up. She said that they were a bother of the hill to see a new baby, & they left on the garden & the chair. I understood & I blessed them.

I took the other chair, & Rita climbed down & climbed upon my knee. She looked up at me solemnly, & asked me a child's candid question.

"Why do you ever see me so often, Uncle Robert?"

I laughed.

"I am, Miss Carmel."

She climbed up her nose at me.

"You must like nobody."

"I do," said I, "you & your example."

"And - Mamma."

"By you out her mother."

"Yes," - I told you mother the most wonderful woman in the world."

I took care. I wanted a shaded, & I was sitting at the window ^{try} to read a book which I had brought with me. It was a most depressing book by one of the very analytical, Frenchmen, ^{belonging} brilliant with ideas & capital experience. I felt it was literature such as this that made me realize how lost was the present generation, bewildered, bewildered, wandering in a wilderness of words. Words, words, words, gabble in the air, no music in the wind. I laid the book down, & looked at the Cornish scene. It had come for me, like some of the Hartfield days & nights. I recalled a winter picture that had for me the ^{wonder} of a child, a little moon & Venus hanging in the branches of a winter orchard tree like a star in the forehead of mystery. The grass would be so subdued that it looked like frost, & over garden Mabel said a black had as though broken in the dawn.

Then I heard her knock.

"Can I?"

I stood up & looked at her, & she smiled back.

"When will you have it?"

"Here - by the sea & sky."

I removed the book from the stool & she placed the tray upon it. I did not attempt to touch her.

"Thank you, I should."

I saw her glance at the book.

"Baffled, I see."

"I've read it, or tried to. - I can't go. By long with the between help part down a night."

I said: "I think I shall have to consult you about the book. - 'The River that One Dead.' It's such too much. ^{unpleasant} for me. I think I can't be a rather simple sort of soul."

She said a thing that surprised me.

"I had good - for that."

She was to give me other surprises. The Marshes had managed to have more help, & I should & Peter & I were to share the afternoon together. We chatted up part the cattle & down the path to the wild ground, & sat there in the sun. The evening & then

I thought of I had a all the old
recaptives who had dwelt there when they were not buying the chips
in a house from the East. The pattern of life must have been
more plain for them, God-fearing men with a regular faith in the
that were eternal.

I said to Snolde - "So you have read that book. What did you
make of it?"

Peter was wondering about a search of blackberries, & Snolde was
watching her.

"By the way that is not - that."

"The child?"

"Yes. - She was so very old. - Not the very young. - That's
the one that has kept me - some, ready to give her some
faith - that is really."

I reached for her hand.

"You have. - It's a happy little face."

Her eyes closed a minute. She began to speak about like some
oracular creature ^{out} of the past, & I sat & listened & the spell of her
was upon me. "I was once speaking, once who had never known a
faith - loyalty go down a river, once who had seen nothing &
beaten the road looking of man. And I was shocked &
filled with profound confusion. I was like some people by being
to the world of the Mother Spirit speaking of what had been a
what was, blindness, for better, a kind of horror of the same flesh.
There was nothing at a dreadful mutilation, & feeling it both
but made a woman."

I was startled, yet stayed in that. How much had I learned in
her, a hour little. She seemed to slow beside me. She was
the eternal mystery manifesting to me in the flesh & in the spirit.

I said in her a minute.

"You make me feel noble, Snolde."

"Noble, dear mad. No need for that."

"It's a good feeling, what we need."

She was watching the child.

"If only the world could get back to - that. If it ^{could} go on its
own to reality."

"A new voice? - But where & how?"

She was right for some reason, & about her people was
peace with another concentration. Her hand still held mine as
though the contact helped her.

"I have had to try & make my very behavior really. Yes,
part for her & something in myself. Otherwise - Oh, well, can
I be understood?"

"I can. - You have had to fight."

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"How I art! A cheep would suit you to be cheep. You see, I was a happy child. I believed in jays & thys, and then I died & go on all that again? To find that you have given a been fooled, & treated like a knave."

That made me fume in my tundra towards her. I had an arm round her now.

"Pardon me that word again to me, Snoldda. - By God - you - are too to believe. - Do you know, my dear, - I think there is really deep down in me which does believe in something which clings round words. The old would cheep her behind - though none of the gods my son shape to us. - My dear - our mother's reputation is a testimony & a challenge."

She sat my still leaning against me.

"Oh - let's believe, - let's be children - or mad together. Happy are those who still have faith. - I feel I don't believe."

"Be not alone, my dear. The trouble is that the world is too short a chain to get down a it's here before the eternal mystery."

She turned her face & smiled me.

"Thank you, cascade a dearest of men. - How you have helped me you do not know."

And then we saw Rita running to us, carrying a small blackbird in the shape of a bag.

"I've found them, mine. I picked them for you."

She opened the improved bag in her mother's lap, & a dozen or so blackbirds lay there. I saw Snoldda give a small shiver.

"Thank you, darling."

To me it seemed that God was back in his world Heaven, & that Christ's words might have come to us out of the September sky.

How does experience can clarify the future for one. I had been bold and considering the fact that was "The Drowned," a kind of human compass put over the ledge. Also, I will confess to have felt worried about future finance, & my progress in a world that was being held to death. And suddenly all that passed. I could look in the face of the future, for - I - had been challenged by a woman's courage & the tragedy it had transcended.

What a comrade was this to go through life with!

I could talk to her quite calmly about this.

How long was the interlude to last, & when would she marry.

She said - "These dear people have been kind to me. I shall like to go on helping till the deed is over."

I approved of that. I told her that I should like her to be married to me in the old church of St Paul in Ranelagh,

* that Pete could play housemaid. Afterwards we could celebrate with the Mauleys at one of the two hotels. Which was it to be? She chose the Salle Rocher.

She could even laugh over that
"I've been there when I have been on the rock, dear ma."

"Symbeline, & I am playin' Thacker to Aristotle."

Then I spoke of "Hartfield" & that other home across the way. Hartfield should make a happy home for the child, but - dear ma! "The President" would have to be blotted out. I was not going to have a dispute and the Howard engaged on our doorstep.

She said - "That would no longer frighten me."

As I spoke of other things, or rather I did. I had named some money, about twenty thousand pounds, & I told her that I should settle half of it on her, yet, a deal of heart which should be at her service. ^{recognition} As I felt about it was that a woman & a wife should have ^{recognition} money of her own, & not have to scrape it out of household expenses. I had piled for pocket-money. I felt sure to find her more than that of the I had said or done.

"I'll earn it, my dear ma."

"Earn it?"

"Yes, I hope so. - I may have to play cook, you know. I am quite a good cook."

I laughed a little at her.

"And - chamber-maid! - well, - I dare say I could be useful about the house, especially when it is home."

That raised the problem of Bill & Betty, & I pondered it on the way home. It seemed to me that capital came down over the top, & a straight human appeal to two very human people. Betty & Bill had a part of the home to themselves, & it would continue to be their, & if they could continue to regard that as home there need be no cloud.

I put it to them that evening. I called them into the parlour & made them sit down, & gave each a glass of sherry.

I said - "I am going to be married, & my wife has a child. You have been good friends to me - a dear friend in your, my dear. You may wish to go, or wish to stay. I think you can love the child, & I think I can be a rather lovable. I had it over."

I saw them look at each other a while. It was Bill who

spoke. He raised his glass to me.

How's happenin', son. - Speech for you, I agree - I'm been happy here. What about you, Betty?

She sat solemn with her hands folded in her lap.

"If Bill's happy, so am I, son."

And that was that.

Bill had often sworn for me. "The Dardoon" had had the worst wind and rain its opening, & it was more than known that for two days Horwood had been capably riddled. However, in fact the whole statue was proving to be a very goodly adventure down to mother earth. It was from the probable that the Dardoon would be a million, & well private car off the road the Dardoon's curtain could hardly be a disaster. Of course, Horwood's rich father could swing a gun for his name, but to an entrepreneur that was tottering this night from the last part.

Strolling in the Hunt field garden with its September security & autumn down I was saying old Potter his father for a while. The great, round, round & the Dardoon Dardoon were plenty all over the garden, & in the old orchard apples were thick in the trees. He had a cellar in which some of the late buyers lived till the following June, & a very good old Potter would look the way down. Suddenly he had apples very well and for Sandy pie.

The Dardoon chapter had reached me, & a very welcome one. I was going out to post an acknowledgment, & also a letter to Dan Meadows who I saw at Horwood. He also was going to the post. The fellow looked a little tired, his red cheeks swollen, & there were freckles under his long hair. He ignored each other, & yet walked about nearly side to side of the pillar bone. He was just a little ahead of me, & as he turned away after slipping two or three letters into the box he spat that sudden word at me. "Well, Dan Bygon, son's the new start?"

Strangely enough I had no eye to hit him. Right - my last day with Snodden & the child had put me above such heartless hell celebration. I slipped the two letters into the box.

I said - "Tell me, Horwood, just why did you grow into such an evil state? Have you done that way, or -?"

He walked at me as a fat shadow.

"Dad, bloody fool, are all you?"

My answer was - "It may be better to be a little foolish than capably fool."

That was all that passed between us. I followed a few yards behind him as he labored along on his tottering legs. His bun-head loaded down between his shoulders, & his graying black hair needed cutting. All the oily anapace seemed to have gone out of him, & I got the feeling that he & the County Club were finished & for as I was & seemed.

I was wrong.

XXIII

Soulda rose with to me daily, & I to her. I am an indifferent letter writer, ^{if I have} I have marvelled at the profinity of literature of the Victorian in paper. But it that they had more leisure I mean to say? More leisure - certainly, but are ^{are} excluded a shotted out - have been like most board children ^{board school} & a dark close place. There is much that we could say, but in the age of gabble silence is more worthy, like some old church yard where the dead lie at peace & are not disturbed by the rattle & rattle of modernity. Big Ben boms, over in the winter; Mr. Brown & Mr. Shirell blow like brown birds. We are told to do all the things that - yesterday we were told not to do. The Ministry of Food intends we had to cook without fat, or to persuade potatoes color to appear in fairy dawn. I my father to furnish meat in the winter, but when some kind of ^{became} became imperative, I say "Shut up" & a rattle he off. Yes, I must confess that I am like the old house I live in, remote & remote & being rational. I can imagine how Huntfield might feel upon a hundred bagelons to being up round it.

"Except" ^{one} of the Marchants.

Do not not ^{one} to escape from nature for a world that is about as inclusion a hanging as a power the drill?

Two days passed without a letter from Soulda, & I wondered why. I suppose real silence are absolutely disturbing to a man's love, about nine o'clock I rang of the "Sole Rock". The girl in the office answered me, ^{she was} one of those gentle blacks. Could I speak to Miss Mallory? I had given my name, & instantly she was helpful.

"Of course, Mr. Brown. She's in the hotel. I'll find her."

I had to wait but then a minute, & then I heard her voice.

"Hallo."

"Hallo, darling. Everything all right?"

"Yes, Dan."

"I haven't had a letter for two days."

"No? - why I have written."

I haven't reached one yet. There is a poor soul of a father who would like this up. I'll look into it.

He talked for another minute or so, & ^{the} conversation was mutually over. I gathered that the nice girl had left Soulda alone with the telephone. I blessed her.

I told Bill about the missing letter & asked him to get hold of the particular postman - if I did not catch him in person. It had occurred to me that one or both of Harold's letters might have been left at "The Meadows" by mistake, & that was the way it did not want. Howard did not show his address, & being what he was I did not want him to know it.

I lay about for that postman, & caught him in his morning round. He had ^{one} letter for Huntfield.

He was an amiable, jolly, stammering creature, & I was gentle with him.

"Can you quite sure there wasn't a letter for me yesterday?"

"I'm sure, sir. I left it here."

"I'm afraid you did not."

"I can remember it, sir, because a blooming wisp of a man on the neck - was there."

"So - you did deliver letters at The Meadows."

"I did, sir, several, & most of 'em looked like bills."

I let him go, but I was bothered. What with the story of a sleepy wisp & his muddled mentality I felt certain that Harold's letter had been in the batch he had delivered. The remedy was obvious. I strolled across to "The Meadows". The place had a forlorn & deserted look. The porch paving had not been cleaned, & cigarette ends lay there. I rang the bell, & a rather dirty looking waiter in his white gloves & grey black trousers came to the door.

"Is Mr Howard in?"

He looked dumb - & long.

"You'll find him in the office."

I walked in. The office door was ajar. I pushed it open & saw Howard & myself in a chair behind his desk. He looked dazed & stupid. At which better, a glass & syphon decorated the desk.

"Good morning, Mr Howard, I rather think a letter of mine has been left here by mistake."

He glanced at me.

"No, it isn't."

"Quite sure?"

He looked at me, & his face was flushed & frowning.

"Get out of here, damn you."

I stood stock still.

"Thank you for your nice manner. - I rather believe you are a boy."

He made an effort to get up, but he was so rattled that he collapsed back into his chair.

"Get out of here - you blasted pup."

I felt queer, but I laughed.

open coffin, & that he could drive to the South end if he so
chose. - I called to Bill, & told him to wait the Mercedes
agete & report if Howard's red car appeared. It did not, &
after breakfast I went down to the Meadows, & my way was marked
by the same slowly, dumb-rany water.

"Mr Howard is."

The fellow had opened the door just nine inches.

"No. gone away" & he closed the door on me.

I went back & ran up "The Sells Rocks", having warned Bill that
I wanted him to wait out up to Paddy's. He had sufficient petrol
for that. I was now alone before I a voice around me, it was
the voice of the gutter blunder. I said that I was coming to St. Peter's,
& could they put me up? Yes, the reason was they were out. And could
I speak to Mrs. Mallory. I had the fidgets, & they wanted to
cut me off before I heard S. Goldie's voice.

"Don't speak. - Can't come tonight. Just a word of
warning. It may be nothing, but a certain person has disappeared
& his car."

"From the Meadows."

"Yes, my dear. - He has been drinking hard, & is in a pretty good
tizzy. I thought you ought to know."

"Oh, that you, dear mad. Do come quickly."

"I'll be with you tonight. Will you get Joe to meet
me."

Howard must have driven like a maniac on that September
day. Certainly he had a fast car, & a half drunk driver was at
the wheel, & he was not more drunk & dazed when he reached
St. Peter's. S. Goldie had taken my warning seriously, & with strange
precaution had brought Peter down with him to the hotel. And
that is what had happened. Howard had parked his car in
an open space of the park close to the end of playground
where the one thing for children. He had climbed up to the
Pegelby & with a kind of treacherous subtlety had called for
Mrs. Mallory. Mrs. Pegelby, suspecting nothing, had told her that
Mrs. Mallory was at the Sells Rocks, & that she would not be
home till dawn or later.

Howard had gone down & waited by the new wall close to the
hotel. The trade was in, & Peter Pegelby, chief had noticed him
there, just as a local my mother's policeman's dog. Peter had
been half way up the hill when he had heard that sounds

barley wine, ^{he} had turned about & waited. Sordda & the child had come from the Saddle Rocks to be captured by ^{that} dead madland beast. He had followed them along the path & of the lane, shouting obscenities. - Peter had passed them to him with an air of reluctance.

"There goes the halibut & her bastard. - I've had her, & she's going to have ^{another} and by me."

He had kept on shouting & following them, & people had come to the door. I can picture that ghastly program. But Peter had put an end to it. He was one of those little & mischievous with a strength that could be actual, when his temper was up. And his temper had flared when he had seen the face of mother & child, & that other face, dead & cold & furious. He had knocked Howard flat with the cobble of the lane, & had stood over him while mother & child ^{had} passed on to the white gate of the cottage.

A nice picture - indeed, & hardly credible! I must have arrived about half a hour after the pilgrimage of Sordda, & as we drew towards "The Saddle Rocks" I spotted Howard's car parked there. I left Joe to carry on of nature, & I made straight for the Pigeon. I did not know then what I was to know in five minutes, & I knocked at the number of open doors & at the very first I looked at me.

Peter was with ^{at} the gate, a ^{young} Jim Peter. I suppose he thought it best to get the breath blown over, & he told me what I have just recorded.

"Good God! - Sordda in the room!"

"But don't be afraid of 'Sordda' - when I let him up, run!"

"I wish you'd killed him. I shall. - And where -"

"In the cottage with the child."

Mr Pigeon opened the door to me, pointed to the stairs, & nodded. I don't know whether she was woman-wise, or was if I showed wisdom in going up, but must there I did. The door was closed & I opened it. I saw Sordda sitting on the bed, with the child beside her. Her face was about bleached, frozen & stony without expression. About it was a dead face.

I closed the door. It was the child who spoke. She ran to me, put up her arms, & I lifted her up, & going to a chair by the window, set her on my knee. I kissed her. Sordda did not speak, but looked at me with eyes that might have seen nothing.

"Oh, Uncle Bob, that sound man!"

I don't know how the information came to me, but come it did. I made myself say.

"Why he was what we call drunk, darling - just didn't know what he was doing. - You don't know what - drunk - is."

His yellow little face looked up at me.

"No, Uncle Bob, but he - stumbled -"

"I know. He did not know what he was doing, Peter. When a silly man gets like that - he's just silly. He don't take any notice of us."

She decided at once no more.

"I don't want to see him again, Uncle Bob."

"You want, darling. I can promise you that."

I looked across at Soulda, & his face had come alive. She gave me a look I shall never forget. I saw, turned Peter off in the air, & then gave him a playful hair.

"Look after mother. - I must go to sleep. See you again presently."

She threw her arm round my neck & hugged me.

I sat in my room, crossed to the bed, & put my head to Soulda's forehead. She sat quite still, her hands in her lap.

"This is the end of the interlude, Soulda. - I want you with me now & always."

I closed the door. I was half way down the stairs, when the door opened & I heard her voice.

"Don't, oh - Don't, don't do anything."

I turned & smiled at her.

"No, my dear. - What you & I need is - peace."

I found Peter waiting for me, & I took him by the arm.

"Peter - I shall wait for you."

"I'm here, Sir."

"Can you get some stout fellow who ^{can} keep guard here?"

"I can get my brother."

"Good man. Get him. I'll wait."

I went in a room with Mary Peggotty, & I said - "Mary, I've come to believe in the Devil. He will do some more."

She answered me with a huge gasp.

"I have always believed in the Devil, Sir, ^{because} perhaps I married a good man."

It was growing dark now, but we sat in the dark. She heard me, & I went to the door. Peter was back with his brother Simon. He stood beside me.

"Simon, if that evil person should come back here, hit him for me."

Some had a black beard. He gazed at me.

"I'll hit it to hell, sir."

"Good man. That's where he should be."

Landow were abt now, down what. He went down the steps
down the steps to the main street. He found Howson's ^{car}
still there, it had body less red, but its cream wheels ^{showing} in
the dark. It was empty. I had no torch, but a box of
matches. I opened the door, & struck a match. I saw now two
bags in the car, but I saw a half empty whisky bottle on
the seat beside the driver's seat. I collected it, & threw it over
the harbor wall into the sea.

I rejoined Peter.

"We'll wait here. - I may have to wait all night."

"What about the police, sir?"

"I'd rather huff the police out of it."

"Then - I'm with you, sir. Had a meal."

"Not yet."

"Go and have a feed, sir. I'll huff the police an' you."

I went across to the "Sole Rocks", & the first person I met
was Mackay. I think he had been with - for me, for the
report of that filching of some meat had spread over half of
the village. Yet, though his bright eyes seemed by force, he never
mentioned it, for which I blushed.

"Come a drink with us, Byers."

"Shah. - if you don't mind me saying it. - I'm a sort of ^{some}
S'm in duty. - I suppose that fellow did not come in here."

"He did not."

"Now the Ship's Pattle?"

"No, or we would have thrown him out."

That was all that we said to each other, & when I joined
them at their table, there too had a ^{supper} people talked
about anything a little but the subject that most had been in
the mind of all three of us. That was true when the land
some place of a woman in company, a woman who could repair
from asking derogatory questions. I think we did discuss the
political scene, & the effect of the New Freedom upon those
who were not permitted to be free. I drank nothing, excused myself
from coffee, but a puff - the boys, & went out to rejoin Peter.
I found another person beside Pagell, the local constable
who was a friend of mine.

"Evening, officer."

"Evening, sir."

"No light in the car. - I'm afraid. Shall I wait in car?"

"Sart as you please, ma. Do you want me to take mother?"

" I should be grateful if you could leave it to us.

" I think I might have, provided -"
I nodded at him.

"Quite so. I shall look for an official who ^{can improve} has sense. But there is as they you could do."

~~But that just has been the~~
"What's that, now?"

"What's that, now?"
"I said out if the fellow I'm got in my back, there of 40 rounds.
Look on that he has been dead for days."

So " Said out if the fellow has got in anywhere, Place of Howards.
Look on that he has been drunk for days."

"I can do that, no". - "But my child can be a good reason. Right to state."

"As I said - officer, you're a man of some."

So this I think must have been the case of the strongest night
I have experienced - now, stronger than some of the new members,
of quality is a bit thick, being backed or mounted, wants to attack
about same orchard in Thomash. P.C. has come back later
to say that he had visited all the hives & jars, & could get
no more of H. wood. So done on the hives. As he was waiting
to smell back to him can a clean out, - or ^{little} he lying
doubled in some cases.

The light of St. Michael's were out; people were in bed. The little place was so little save for the wall of the sea. We walked up & down, listened, & about midnight I went back up to the cottage to make sure that nothing had happened there. He came back to tell me that all was ^{just} peace, & that Simon had closed down on the parlor sofa.

I said - "Better than in Peter - I can manage."

But he would not leave me. Something of his Cornish justice had been named, for he was a God-fearing man like his father, a week day I went to thank him for having been with me. He made certainly doubly sure I removed the chertabula head from Howonwican by the light of a Torch Peter had brought back with him. Most certainly I wanted to be rid of the snake, but he was not to mind just as he pleased. As yet I had not had of hands a mi.

I don't know how many papers we searched that night. We sat in the car, strolled about, leaned on the new wall under the stairs. To me - there was something of old Homer & the Odyssey in the night vigil, with new, talk & work that were as old as Time, & a yearning to know - a yearning that

now refuse. He could see the vague shapes of boats at the
 morning, boats moving gently like cinders rocked by the faintest of
 winds, & all things there how I am looking for the footprints
 of the man whom I tried to kill.
 I found myself talking to Payell upon the subject of subjecting
 God, though in the man he did most of the talking. With a
 kind of simple propriety & in the language of the people & of a
 man who lived by the sea, he made his confession to me.
 He was the elder of generations who had gone down to the
 sea in ships. He knew the sea. He had seen of the
 aragon - the self-assured glimmer of the townsmen.

So the dawn came. It spread a greenish glow above
 the hills. The water poured from my eyes blackness to blue
 below. I was tired & sleepy, and yawned. He had
 been waiting for the last hour at the abandoned car.

"I want to stretch my legs, Peter."

"Same here, sir."

I got out, - stretched, yawned, & now colour came back
 into the world.

"What about the hole, Peter?"

"Ready fall, sir."

His face looked grey & grim. He lit a pipe. I stalked
 to the sea wall, & looked a row - gave a little flourish
 below me in the water.

"Good God, Peter! - Can you?"

It was Howard's body that had been washed into the
 shallows, floating half submerged, arms spread, face of a man
 & gaily smiling with the movement of the sea.

Profiting in one of the cups or blessings even the most
 innocent may have to suffer.

Who would to describe the dispute, or to answer questions that have to
 be asked. Sober, Payell & I were the principal witnesses, but
 no evidence could show how Howard had come to be drowned.
 Had it been suicide, or murder, or had he slipped and blundered off
 the harbor quay into the sea? Of your conduct, I have some
 signs of being about his head, & I believe that Peter's explanation
 was the correct one. It had been long with it the time, &
 Howard might well have walked along the quay edge in the
 darkness, but he found in a stone & lost there for the sea &
 came in a dream. The medical evidence was that of drowning.

And murder? Had any one a motive, and occasion to kill the
 the boat, but to Howard? - Out of the manly. Well, I had

that picture, & I admitted it, & it was then that I realized how protective Peter's presence had been to me. I had not been alone the whole night.

So, an open verdict had to be returned, & the inquest was a death on the man who had owned it.

I still never forget how I solder stood up to that ordeal, for an ordeal it was, & yet I had the feeling that the goodwill of those of law & order was for me. About, & by, & stopped brief & public, but with a courage & dignity that ~~impressed~~ ^{impressed} me. All that was said was accepted without question.

As for Peter's reply, I think his ^{integrity} ~~integrity~~ did more. The ~~after~~ ^{after} the to move the man & woman who were ~~living~~ ^{living}, especially an ~~action~~ ^{action} of his.

"I searched the chamber, & found a dead flat, & if God be deemed it."

That while I had wished & killed I killed into society. I stayed on at St. Owen, during those official days before I could join Solder at the church of St. John's, Rockland. I think the spirit of the little Council place was with me, in fact the goodwill manifested in my way. - Solder had waited upon me about up to the day of our marriage, & each morning I was up early & met him at the village & walked down with him to "The Solle Rock". He was quiet, & subtle, & smiled upon. And when I went out with Peter's people to whom I had never before stopped to speak to me. So that Peter's appearance & public was a minor spiritual program.

The dead was more open & strong up at me, with a black sheet of hair kept ~~sticking~~ ^{sticking} to a few and his low forehead. It might have been alive, waving a macho finger at me. Yes, damn the fellow, for even in death he could be ~~more~~ ^{more} ~~starkly~~ ^{starkly} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~dead~~ ^{dead} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~alive~~ ^{alive}. The dead are final, & in I stood look down at the thing, with Peter beside me, I reached what Ray before Solder. An input, the press, the dead & the dead paper. As if she had not suffered sufficiently without this tragedy.

I ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~confess~~ ^{confess} that I said - "Damn the woman. Why the devil did he want to get himself drowned?"

Peter was leaning over the wall. I said that it seemed to either of us that there was a chance of a rescue, but it was needed to make one. "Smash, sir."

"I said that the best loved child too well."

"Just begged a tubful in - off the guy - garden."

"More than half."

And then that other word shot into my mind. Murder!

I was not quite sure, but I did realize that something had to be done about that fat bit of dead flesh. The police, Better get the barrain capbited before St. Thomas woke up. Peter went off to hook up P.C. Geo, & I walked up a down path like some angry creature in a cage. I thought of what it might all mean to Siddle & reassured me.

London
 So the minute Payell was back with P.C. Geo, most magnificently dressed in what a town. He & Peter unloaded a boat by the bay steps, & paddling to the cove, got a rope round it & towed it under the same rocks below the hotel. I scrambled down to give them a hand, & the three of us managed to pull the body out of the water.

I was sure a hani on Howonchi chi.

"Sawen hit hi" said P.C. Geo.

"That was my man. I guess" said Peter.

"I saw hi now."

He rolled the body over, & there was a raw wound at the back of Howonchi's head.

"Look at that. - Shocked into the sea."

I was aware of Geo giving an awkward glance at me.

"But who?"

Payell was rubbing hi chi.

"Paddles of us, Pa chi, he was together all through the night, & now saw the fellow."

"Ferry barrain."

Peter was still rubbing hi chi.

"That was funny. He was pretty drunk. Sidi was low & he may have fallen off the top quay & hit his head on a stone. I saw the fellow come in & finished hi. Good barrain too - I should say."

thought with me
P. L. Dec. 1891. I had a note-book that he had a copy of
into his own pocket. He spoke to Peter.
Pen-
to help care

" By one Saint not real."

12. *Ad. m.*

"I am going up to see Mrs. Malley. She will have to be told after what happened yesterday."

Page 20 gave me a Back Book.

"May 2 hour, 2nd, 1st"

"Well, we are to married in a month or so, & if you should tell me I think I have that right." ^{at the breakfast} said the doctor have to be

I could discuss the ^{at the bank} ~~you have~~ mail. The police have to be
suspicious.

"Did you see the lady last night - again, sir?"

" Que, & Peter cottage with son child.

"Person" Another one.

But no did I, with a shad of agreeing. Conf. P.C. Geo
chief of suspect P.C. Geo of Law, fished Hollywood to the
sea?

Just below it, just over the rock & over the harbour wall. Just west of the Stanley Hotel.

But in silly questions I asked a good one.

But his silly questions shocked a dignified man.
"Oh, come, Sir, off with you, don't neglect Poor Malley
of Cork, that fellow into the sea."

On her to that of every thing, son. And mother,

Q. Ate no. 1. I had a pretty good morning.

"Maybe you had, sir, I don't know what Peter says - no
offense."

made very large, that P. C. Geo had become the
down & almost hostile official. Well, the gov was in, but his
suspicion went on & reaching up & such & even the sea would
towards the same look of the steep hill. Sent no one. As yet

(After 174)

Still I can forget coming out of the hotel with Rita,
seeing that red car & the ^{Howard} standing by it. My first impulse was
to go back into the hotel, but now they & will they have to be
faced. Now I think - could any woman have foreseen the
homicidal heartiness of his gesture & without regret.

I walked dead on air, holding the child's hand, & we had not
gone ten yards before he began shouting at me. I was a fool, I
took the child a fortnight, & I had been his mother. The man might
be mad & drunk, but the intensity of the thing was incredible. He
followed us with those foul howling, & I glared down at
Peter frightened little face.

"It's noisy, darling. The silly man is drunk."

Both those other faces, at dawn & window, & the father's face
of whom of those we passed! I just walked on thickly, & he
still followed us. Oh God, what a pilgrimage of public shame!

And then I saw Peter, & his swarthy face had a hint of
white rage.

I said - "Help me, Peter."

He seemed to flinch past me, & I heard the blow. I stood
my head, & saw Howard flat in the ground, & Peter standing
over him. Oh, blessed blow.

And blessed cottage! I took Rita off the stair, & sat on the
bed with the child on my knee. I was trembling; I felt cold,
a green, frozen heat of fury. Could I ever face those
father's faces again? And what was the child thinking?

And then?
~~How miserable & hostile!~~

I found myself staring at Peter's hair. She looked up at me, & I
saw the light in her eyes. What work would come from them.

"The foolish man frightened my mummy."

"Yes, darling, but -"

"I'm not frightened ^{now}, and I do love you, mummy."

I just burst into tears.

175
St. Moore had its eyelids closed, but as I reached the cottage
the door opened, & Simon Pagell came out. "Good good, for Simon!"

"Hello, Simon, had some sleep?"
"Just a bit of what you, Sir."
"Tell me, when you awake most of the night?"
"Yes, most of it."
"How are left the cottage?"

"He stood all one in astonishment."
"No, Sir."

"Same?"
"Pretty near. - I'm a light sleeper, & I didn't sleep as you
tell about from the morning. I heard the old clock strike."

"Thank you, Simon. You'll know before long why that may be
important. I'll wait till dawn at the harbor. I'll stay here,
be found that blackboard dead in the sea."

When Simon had turned off I stood at the foot of the stairs
a bit. I could hear no more, & then the door opened &
I saw Mrs. Pagell at the top of the stairs.

"Oh, Mrs. Pagell, will you tell Mrs. Mellor I want to see her,
it is rather important."

"I will, Sir."

I went out into the garden & waited. The sun was up & the
sky clearer & the air fresh & clean. My shadow began
lengthen that it? Peter Chapman was in full flower, & I saw
the black go up across the way. I was aroused. I waited some
quite some when I could talk to Isolda without, & I remembered
that there was another lane which ran northward along the flank
of the hill. I leaned up on the white gate & tried to find a
better measure.

When I found the door open behind me. I turned a new door
framed in the doorway. I looked at her, but she was smiling.

"What is it, Dan?"

"She seemed to have changed her mind."

"I want to tell to you. Let's shall."

She came to the gate, & she was a man. I opened the gate, &
put an arm about her. If we were to make a public it
should not be like yesterday's pilgrimage. He reached the opening of
the other lane, passed along it & at last came to the garden that
was shut off by a low stone wall. The sun was shining on a tree,
& I found her towards the well.

"All seems here. - It hurt me to trouble you, darling, but it will
soon be over. Tell me, you did not leave the cottage last night?"

"She looked at me, questioning."

"No, but why?"

"And Peter was with you?"

"Yes."

"A certain person was found drowned down yonder."

I felt her stiffen, & I held her close.

"Oh, - Don! What?"

"You, dear heart. - It will mean -"

She drew ^{her} deep breath & held it.

"That - I - shall have to -"

"You, both of us. - Some might have spared you this."

Suddenly she drew away from me. She spread ^{her} arms to the wall, & her head went down a dead, & that bowed head of hers didn't rise. I touched her. She was motionless, rigid.

"Don't, Don, for a moment."

"I want, darling."

Her heart seemed to can a gas in little ripples, & I wished to God that Howard was close for me to get my hand on her.

"Don -"

"You, my dear?"

"It makes an impact?"

"A good one. I shall be sitting beside you."

"Oh, - Don, it will mean that Rita -"

I had not thought of that, & it shocked me.

"Don. I'll try to see to that. - And when it's all over you & I - Rita's always been so brave."

And suddenly her head rose, & she stood facing the door, & the early light played upon her face & hair.

"Here I am."

"You."

"How fate & fear & bewilderment can haunt me. - I'll face it, Don."

I put an arm round her & she leaned against me.

"Then of course - we'll go home together."

~~Don's story~~

I wasn't used to such a deed. I went down to have a walk & breakfast. The Donkeys were late that morning, & when I had finished I went across to the Donkey table. They - of course - had heard the news, but what I did not know was that Don Donkey had heard the whole of Sholeha's story. There too were her dear close friends.

"Can I have a word with you, Donkey, after breakfast?"

"Sure."

I saw his wife look at him as a woman who is sure to may this look at a man, & then she glanced at me. She smiled.

(After 176.)

I ^{thought} ~~thought~~ when I saw Dan in the garden that he had had mean for me, but how both bad & good it was I did not guess. One became so sensitive to the face of someone who one loved. I rather suspected that he had had another quarrel with Horwood, & that he was still feeling fierce about it, but when he looked at me his eyes were a lover's eyes. He put an arm round me, & how glad I was of that arm & of what it symbolized. I could bear this if they did not take his away from me.

When we had walked along that other lane & down to a quiet spot behind some gardens he drew me to the wall & stood still. It was all very dark in the early twilight, & yet - somehow - sinister. I felt his hand on my arm, & then he told me.

Oh - my God!

For I understood at once what this meant to us, more revealed, perhaps, a public feeling of all my secrets. Could I bear it? And would the child be involved? I was dead down, desperate. I did not want to be touched even by him. It would be like being alone with some fierce physical pain.

I then, roughly, seemed to fling myself as hard as I could against himself & the evil it could throw his arm into my face. I would fight it; I would be fierce & tough, a braver enemy if they chose to see me like that. I had been dead - down, but now I was dead-in-arm, & I felt the sunlight warming my face. He must have been watching me, for he put out an arm & drew me to him.

"Heads up, I would. - We are in this together."

He turned my head, & suddenly the anger seemed to go out of me. I had his loyalty & his faith in me. I felt that there was nothing I would not do for him. I could face it; I would face it.

"If we can keep Rita out of it -"

"Be damned to them. We will."

I tell Maudie the whole story, & the deplorable part Howard had played ^{through all of} it. He wanted to keep the child out of it, & Maudie, with a ^{ignition} of his own, understood an other. And what could he do about it? Soulda & I would have to go through the pretty business, but that Peter should be dragged in to better to all that turned was incredible.

"No, by hell -" & then his wife came in & sat down like some biggie's dear mother, & looked at us both with her hair blue eyes. I was begining to tell her, when she said & said - "I know," & there was something in the way she said it which had meaning for some men.

Well, Maudie got about a good deal in the case of Carroll, & the most American he ever was beaten & a go-getter. Maudie, I suspect that he had been frustrated by his wife. They went off together in a car that morning, & I gather they created official doors, & needed official & professional assistance. Soulda told himself can handle the committee. I believe they were told that the kind of intervention was most improper, but the official would do it later.

Maudie came back with very bright eyes.

"I was told to get to hell out of this."

"And did you?"

"My wife did it. - I guess they are going to play - you guess - cricket."

"Ida -"

"She will be kept out of it."

"I shall have," said S, - "all that you -"

"No," my wife. I never knew she had such a tongue in her."

I walked down with Soulda to attend the inquest, & I had a curious feeling that the good-will of the little Carmichael community was ours. There was no gossiping & no chatter. After all - we were lower, & what does the old tag say? The inquest was held in, one of the local pubs, & since the room was of no great size it apparently was crowded ^{accommodated} to the jury, witnesses, etc., & in the meantime how would the public should stage sympathy by staying away. The Press - of course - was present, & I am determined - if possible - to furnish the Press to ^{publish} it in our mouth.

I need not describe the ^{inquest} ~~inquest~~. Soulda was the first I saw the first witness to be called, & in being completely satisfied I hoped to have Soulda may question. The Carmichael

continue, capital & inquiry. His opportunity was somehow parted; he might have declined my presence & approval of it. I had been the first to see the body? Real. And I had been of all right with Mr. Peter Pagelli, waiting for the deceased's car. And why? He gave me that chance to be candid. I was candid. So I told him the deceased? I had a very much no as a bully, a drunkard & a cad, a degenerate cad. Well, now read the rest. The Coroner pulled me up gently, but he had hit me just on my own, & reached the face of the jury were finally a verdict.

I told Peter Pagelli in one remark was more effective than any other answer given by any of us.

So, the deceased was followed by the lady & the child, a shouting of lament then at them. You. And what action did you take?

"I knocked the drunkard down flat on the cobble."

I was aware of a shuffling sound that might have been applause. The doctor & P.C. Yes were the next witnesses. Death of drowning; brain in the head, an alcoholic stomach.

Then came Snodden's ordeal.

He was calm, pale, head in air. The Coroner was hard to hear. Almost immediately he managed to suggest that - while in the dead man's company - he had suffered from a faint. She had. He so skilled the matter that the defence was obvious. I might have been with, on a bench of thanks, but as the situation developed - the picture seemed to move on. I watched the face of the jury, & with one exception they were friendly. The exception was a man - a decidedly look-like who might have regarded any lawyer as no better than he should be.

Then a few questions from the jury. One elderly gentleman wanted to know whether the doctor's evidence was consistent with Howwood's having fallen off the quay - the dead & when felled will die.

Absolutely so. It appeared to be the most probable explanation.

Then the acid lady wanted to know how long Snodden had known the deceased,

A few months.

And why had Mrs. Mallory, knowing the nature of the deceased, consented to have a meal alone?

Probably the Coroner wanted to hear, & I answered better.

The Coroner summed up. He explained the doctor's evidence, & Peter Pagelli's description of Howwood's drunken condition. His points were made with simplicity & force, & when he put the final question to the jury it took them just three minutes to arrive at

a decuria. The foreman announced at. Death by innuendo while
under the influence of alcohol. I had refused to ~~that~~^{the} bottle I
had found in H. Overwood's car.

S. gave Snodden my am. I saw nothing but fairly fair. P. Lou
P.C. Geo, certainly beside a large Police Inspector from Newham,
looked at me with a human twinkle in his eye. Would the Police
accept the verdict? I glared at the big, redly, bearded face
of the Inspector, & he smiled at me.
That smile seemed to say - "Good luck, sir. The devil is dead
as the devil should be."

S. in question - signed a parole that same day. I had trouble in persuading Broder to hear me, & it was Rita who settled the question for me.

"Do you like it, Rita?"

Did she like it! - She put her arm round my neck, & I glided
a kiss on her little freckled nose.

" Well, that's better it. "

"Johnny is coming too."

I looked at S. & said, "her face was not the face of the morning." Maybe she now life with the joy of her child. ^{mother} S. was to walk the streets with us a white face with a cream carnit.

I called for them at Pangelin's about four o'clock, & I had prepared the feast at a particular tin-shop which specialized in Paddy's. Soda was wearing the fish I had just seen at Paddy's, but her face was not the remote & distant face of that wet June day. Rita walked between us, holding back, that brown hind ^{on} her back, a symbol.

We passed down to the sea, a tunnel westwards away from the little harbor. It was not a tuffen dy, & the face we saw was St. Martin's face. They smiled upon us, & I wanted Sholla to feel those smiles. I can remember one particular incident which made me feel good. We were passing the white cottage where Sai's father & mother lived. They might have been waiting for us, a comely old couple with the face & gentle manner of a tuffen Samaria. Sai's father had a gleam in his head. He stepped out, put a hand to his white head, & smiled all over his handsome old face at Rita.

"Would you like a flower, my dear?"

" Oh - that you. It's a pretty flower."

" So it seems to be."

And old Ben Harvey had a twin.

(After 179.)

I wonder if the little Canal place understood his gesture as I did? It was no signal, and right, and so like him. I think that good nature was more obvious to the simple folk who were not cased with the cloak of self-defense. About you could have put it into Biblical language, "The man, the woman, and the child walked together by the sea. And the sun shone upon them, and the eyes of those who looked upon them were hard." You, part that. But I had a feeling of being healed, and that the bitterness within me was passing.

After that night of simplicity, and Pete had seemed to have with two cream-cakes, and had it rolled up by him, we walked up the hill to the Cattle and sat there on the grass to watch the sun go down. Don took Pete on his knee, and he made eyes at him, and he found a last speck of cream to be removed from his face.

"Well, Don, here's a piece for you. Uncle Rob is going to be a father."

"Are you to be my father?"

"I hope so."

"Dear mother said."

Both of us laughed.

I said, "I hope not."

(Tail Pipe)

^{I hear}
I have often noticed that when a novelist is staying either
substantial or active drama he has to bring Nature into the
room, a good friend about the landscape. Well, there is no
need for me to grow lyrical about Hatfield. You cannot
put a house into prose, but you can feel it & be rooted by
it & react to its many moods. I came to it on an autumn
day with Don & the child, & I came in his wife. The good
Pete had met us at the station, & Betty was there at the
door. I had been wondering about this too, & how they would
accept me, but I need not have worried. We can be
fully sensitive to each other, & there was no hostility or
surprised holding back in Betty.

But the memory of our home-coming on that autumn
day came about two incidents, Peter's accident & the way
she & Don went exploring hand in hand. She had to see
the garden-house & the front house, & the studio where that
portrait of herself hung upon a wall. The old house itself
was a magic place to her, especially so the Queen's Room &
the gallery & the great oak stairs. Her little freckled face
emerged in the stone stair.

"Oh, mum, what it wonderful."

It was.

Then in the dark her I wandered out & came to "The
Meadow." The place was empty, silent, lightless, yet, dead as
all my unhappy years. We stood with our arms round each
other & looked at it, & I was moved to wonder at the
new, fantastic world.

I said - "I suppose this place was an Empire Home.
Drink & thrill - all these dead years, a challenge to
continuity."

He laughed softly, gently.

"Well, yes, escape from being of regulation. I'd prefer the
old back to his cat. - And craftsmen are exquisite. We
seem to be the only few people left in the world."

I understood him, & I said - "Not of any of 'The
Meadow', but through other & more mysterious fields."

He smiled & said.

"With the Butcher's Band when I met at Paddington."

You are somewhat free at Houtfield in spite of the new
totalitarianism which is creeping in like a goby over the old country.
I can paint what I please, & where I please, & yet I have not
to submit my picture to a committee consisting of miners, farmers
& bar-cashiers. I am not moved to apologizing for my
success, though to be successful in the region now is a
standardized country. I have a small room which is the most
absolute & successful front so far as the pettiest population
of Houtfield is concerned. I am indebted to some things, but
I don't. I'm sorry place has not been rounded out by
the large feet of Mr. Seibin. Mr. Brown doesn't bother
me. He is named, but I pay private fees to a doctor
whose entrance has not been changed by his work. I can
challenge at Mr. Shinnell. Enjoy the day & the moment,
& may you shoulder at the future. We may be no more
than circumstances at the disposal of an atomic bomb.

The Orchestra has become a hostel for female agricultural
workers. They are busy, very much, & as a few of them have
become our friends.

I prefer them to hosts.

So, the modern political cinema shows more gradually a
perhaps inevitably tomorrow cheer.

I can say the happy wisdom of the chaffman may be
reborn in a still ~~new~~ ^{and} world, & more rounded world.

Beauty and The Beast

Warwick Deeping

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

It was a grey and dreary day in June. I had been down in the west country where the weather had been kind to me and both sea and sky had been full of colour, but if it rained between Slough and Paddington, I could swear that no man had the right to grumble. For modern man is a messy beast, and there is too much of him, and these fifteen miles or so of industrial hideousness and squalor might cause any artist to question the reality of the modernistic sense of the alternate values. If it rained, and rain it did in proverbial sheets upon that strip of squalor -- what matter?

Old Cobbett, had he ridden through that section of Middlesex, where orchards and green fields had been, would -- I can swear -- have cussed most fiercely and rightly over the wars that had burnt and oozed slime over God's good earth. I looked out of the window and marvelled, and the strangest part of it was that modern man might not be aware of the execrable mess he himself was making.

So, we came to Paddington station. I had helped an old lady down with her suitcase. I lowered my own from the rack and moved into the corridor to find myself blocked by the uncompromising back of a truculent "Third". He had been standing in the corridor, smoking a very foul pipe and blotting out a part of the landscape -- much as I was. A sour-voiced blond had joined him and they were arguing as to the employment of a porter. Nor did they appear to be conscious of the gathering queue behind them.

I said, "Do you mind letting us pass."

The man turned a brazen face on me. He had angry, insolent eyes.

"You can wait your time, can't you?"

I smiled down at him.

"If you would adjourn the debate, we should have a better chance in the taxi queue."

They got out ahead of us and they did not hurry. The blonde made some reference to ruddy snobs. Already the taxi queue was twenty yards long, and to complicate the situation, a deluge was coming through a war-damaged roof and flooded the place where the queue should have continued. I found myself behind the truculent two, and within a yard of the water-splash. An imperturbable young constable who was in charge of operation, strolled down and directed the later comers to form up on the edge of the platform. We -- were on the roadway.

Taxis were exceptionally slow in arriving. About one a minute rolled down the ramp into the station. People were restless. The truculent fellow in front of me kept pivoting and staring at me -- he appeared to be interested in my tie.

He growled, " Rotten show this. We ought to do things better now that we've got rid of the snobs."

His interest in my tie was a challenge. Old School Tie and all that ! I smiled down at him. I was six feet two to his five foot six, and so far as I was concerned, he could assume that he and his now owned the earth. Then, I happened to glance at those who formed the head of the platform queue, and I saw -- her.

She seemed to stand a little apart, tall and straight and slender, and in profile, a profile that made me think of Botticelli. She was wearing a little gold knitted cap on a head of glorious chestnut hair, and an austere bronze coloured frock, a new-look frock. Her eyes were hazel. An old brown suitcase waited beside her. I had a feeling that she was not very conscious of the crowd and did not want to be conscious of it. She stood quite still, aloof and remote, though her face was no marble mask, but as finely wrought as a China vase. There was something un-English about her.

Our queue moved forward very slowly in periodic spasms. Suitcases and bags were lifted and lowered. The deluge from the roof continued, as did

the groushings of the pair ahead of me. It would appear that they had not enjoyed their holiday. And what were the British-Railways doing about that sieve-like roof and the lack of taxis and the weather ? As we shuffled on, I lost sight of the Botticelli at the head of the other queue. If the dream and flavour of her were that of Florence or Vienna, what did she think of our English June ?

People were leaving the queue, but those who had heavy luggage were compelled to remain. I saw the police constable stroll across towards the double file upon the edge of the platform. There was space for more travellers between our tail and the water-splash, and a section of the other queue joined up with us.

A very old lady shuffled up on my left. She was shabbily grey as though covered with cobwebs and her back was as rounded as the back of someone who had suffered from a tubercular spine. She had a face of parchment, spectacles, and one of those contraptions for the very deaf. I became aware of an odour that suggested decay, stale flesh, stale clothes. Shortage of soap, and the slovenliness of the very old who was too weary to wash ?

Yet another odour drifted from another quarter, a fragrance that was not of the flesh. I turned my head and found her standing beside me.

Now -- I -- as a somewhat successful painter of portraits and sensitive to temperament in the sitter, might divine an unusualness in this young woman. I am afraid that in my art I was an unblushing reactionary, a pictorial purveyor and no espouser of an "ism".

I had seen no reason why beauty should not be beauty and perhaps with a sheen of majesty about it and to be considered as one saw it and felt it and not as trigonometry. Even a photo can possess beauty, much beauty, when the taker is capable or suffering the subject to express itself, sea and sky, woodland, a story landscape or some gracious old home. Did any man see the English scene more serenely and completely than Constable and did Romney

give his ladies blue faces and egg cup eyes ? So, this Botticelli girl had a peculiar beauty, a loveliness that was more than mere perfection in the flesh.

Nor was the dreaming mine alone. The little stocky cad in front of me had turned to stare at her. Gosh, here was a Lovely, a creature who stimulated the crude male in him. He began to exhibit himself and to assert his maleness by expressing the patient impatience of these tired people.

What a silly show ! His crude blue eyes invited the Lovely to agree with him. He was some fellow -- what ! Then he must have become conscious of the frank distaste with which I was observing him, and once again he glared at my shameful tie.

I smiled and he looked combative.

“ What’s the joke ? ”

I -- in turn -- looked at his tie.

“ Primordial psyche, sir. I suppose.”

That seemed to puzzle him as he could find no retort. He turned his back on me, and I -- glancing at my Botticelli, saw her as remote as ever, and gazing aloofly over the crown of the little cad’s hat. It was a gaudy green in colour, and had a small red feather stuck in its hat band.

Taxis still lingered. I had stood here for half an hour, and I wondered how the poor mummified old lady beside me could endure it. I calculated that at the present rate of flow we might be here another half hour. People were getting restless, and more of them left the queue. Mr. Green Hat had lit a cigarette and its smoke drifted into my nostrils. I am a pipe smoker with a particular prejudice against second-hand cigarette smoke, especially so when it emanates from unpleasant mouths ! I took off my hat and fanned the smoke away.

The draft I made played upon the little cad’s neck and he turned at me.

“ What’s the idea ? ”

“ I don’t like second-hand smoke.”

“ Oh, don’t you. Well, you keep your hat to yourself -- I -- don’t like draughts.”

I smiled at him and went on fanning. And suddenly he blew up and grabbed a suitcase.

“ Come on, let’s get out of this and pick up a taxi outside.”

They got out and we shuffled up a place.

Then it was that I remembered I had a pretty solid suitcase of my own, and I turned to the old lady.

“ Would you like to sit on this ? ”

She gave me a birdlike glance, a grateful glance.

“ Thank you so much. I would.”

I arranged it for her, and she squatted and began to chatter to me. I could forgive her for her poor old odour. Maybe it was psychological. I glanced at my Botticelli, and for the first time I met her eyes. They gave me a remote smile.

We continued to shuffle forward at minute intervals and I kept moving suitcases for the old dame. She went on chatting to me, but I was still surveying my right hand neighbour. What was the perfume ? And what was she ? Not suburbia or Mayfair, and certainly not Lambeth Walk. My impression was that she was not quite English, but rather renaissance, Vienna or Florence.

More taxis were arriving and we now had only two people ahead of us.

I turned to the old lady.

“ Are you, by any chance going to Waterloo ? ”

“ No, King’s Cross.”

“ Well, you take my turn, I’m in no great hurry.”

She twittered at me like a grateful bird.

“ How kind you’ve been.”

Had I ? Her taxi came, and the young policeman helped her into the taxi. He gave me a friendly smile.

“ You’re next sir.”

“ Taxis seem pretty scarce today -- I wonder if I can give anybody a lift to Waterloo ? ”

The constable glanced at my Botticelli.

“ Any use to you, Miss ? ”

She seemed to hesitate for a second or two and I said, “ If you prefer it -- take the next one on your own.”

She smiled at me.

“ I am for Waterloo -- may I ? ”

“ Why yes, if you can put up with me.”

Her eyes had a strange dark lustre when she smiled and her voice intrigued me. It was not quite English and had a deeper flavour, and a deliberate smoothness. I opened the door of the taxi for her, and passed my own big suitcases to the driver.

“ Waterloo station, please.”

“ Right’o, sir,” and he gave me a fatherly grin.

I got in and closed the door. How little did I realize that in sharing a taxi with her I had opened a door to a whole series of coincidences.

It would have pleased me to have experienced a drive in a Victorian Hansom cab, and I could have pictured her in such a vehicle, wearing some lovely and voluminous frock and a hat of flowery distinction. There was certain austerity about the straight braid frock she was wearing, and for the first part of the drive I saw nothing but her profile. Her bag lay in her lap, and her hands folded upon it. Sensitive, long fingered hands with nails un-tinted. Was she profile conscious ? I rather thought not. I had a curious feeling that she carried with her some poignant, human urge that submerged the lesser vanities. Her perfection seemed without pose. I

could ask myself whether any modern woman cherishes some sacred flame within her. And what justification had I for being so inquisitive ? Yet, is not man's natural curiosity -- woman ? I -- who was so sensitive to beauty in the other sense -- should know that ; I -- whose appreciation had been so quick and universal that I had not mated with finality. I'm a painter of fair women -- and of plain ones -- for that matter, and somewhat successfully so, -- I -- the athlete with a Greek conception of physical beauty, the runner, oarsman, boxer.

Our driver took to the Park. We had been sitting beside each other with consummate correctness, and we had not exchanged a word. Nor was her silence inspired upon her by awkwardness or lack of the finer poise. I was conscious of the same sense of emotion in her. Was it hostility towards man ?

Then, without looking at me, she said with quiet suddenness, "I seem to have seen you before."

I had noticed, tucked into her bag, the folded copy of a colourful periodical. Well, in a sense she had. My photo happened to be in that magazine.

She got my oblique smile and touched the magazine.

"Here ?"

"You have observation."

She did not bleat. "Well, just think of that !" She sat gazing at the back of the taxi-man's red neck. He needed a haircut.

"I saw one of your private shows, Mr. Byron."

"Well, the introduction has been somewhat singular, but it is not yet complete."

Her glance had dropped to her hands, and for the first time I realised that they were ring-less.

"Is that -- necessary ?"

Again that note of remote hostility. Her suitcase was lying there with the label visible, and I glanced at it and then at her.

“Permission granted?”

“Does it -- matter?”

I turned the label over and read --

Isolda Mallory
Paddington and Waterloo

The name seemed to crown her like the little gold cap upon her glorious head of hair. Isolda? Why, I had pictured the Isolda in Tristan and Isolda as a dark and mysterious creature. Yet, mystery was live. And Mallory? An English adaptation?

“Thank you,” I said, “thus far -- we know each other’s names.”

Once more she was profile to me, and wilfully so. This far and no farther? We were crossing Waterloo Bridge. I glanced at her and she seemed more remote than ever. Should I dare to test her unfriendliness? I was still hesitating when we arrived.

I opened the door for her, and she was out in one swift moment. I lifted out her case. She was opening her bag.

“No need,” I said, “the pleasure has been mine.”

Then -- I felt how obvious was the cliché. She took the sentence from me, and I raised my hat to her.

“Goodbye, Miss Mallory.”

She gave me one quick smiling glance and walked away, and I said to myself -- “I suppose this is where things end.”

I turned to pay the driver and found him regarding me with pawky but paternal amusement. Most certainly the “Lovely” was not consenting and I

could put the small change in my pocket.

All that I could remember for the moment was the strong, swift straightness of her as she had walked off with her suitcase. I had a feeling of having been gracefully rebuffed, which perhaps was good for me. My experience with women had been otherwise, and it was I who often had to repulse the ladies. Is that a cad's confession? Well, let it pass, for any vanity I had was to be considerably chastened.

So far as I was concerned she was lost in the station crowd, and I supposed that I should never see her again. Love at first sight after a drive in a taxi, and love lost in a holiday spilling crowd! I was sufficiently modern to laugh at such nonsense, and yet I was wondering whether any other woman had attracted me as she had done, both the artist and the man in me. Even her name made music in the air, and she had possessed for me a mystery that had the strange allure of Wagner's prelude to Tristan and Isolde. Its motif sounded in my head as I made my way to the ticket office.

I'll confess that I looked for her, and having five minutes to spare, wandered up and down in search of that golden cap and glowing head. No luck! Well, it was just a case of ships that pass in the night, and I made my way to the platform and I had my first class ticket clipped.

The train was not yet in, and suddenly I saw her standing by the platform lift, with her suitcase at her feet. So, she was taking the same train as I was and somehow I got a strange feeling of inevitableness. And just as suddenly, I felt shy of her. I -- a man of the world who had had his share of adventure.

I walked slowly towards her. She was looking at the train standing by the opposite platform, and once again she was all profile to me.

I raised my hat.

“ So -- the coincidence continues. May I apologise for taking advantage of it ? ”

She gave me a quick, oblique glance and I could not flatter myself that it was friendly. Two pigeons were strutting about the platform with bobbing heads, and she appeared to become more interested in them than in me. Did she think I had followed her deliberately ?

I said, “ Forgive me, but it -- is -- a coincidence. I thought we were ships that had passed in the night.”

She continued to watch the pigeons.

“ I can't help being in the same platform, Miss Mallory. Your train appears to be my train.”

I began to feel rather foolish. She was so much more the mistress of the situation than I was master of it, if impassively and distantly so. Was she the tough product of these difficult days, with a fallacious and guileful softness in her physical make-up ?

Then our train came rolling in, and she picked up her suitcase and I mine. I saw her move towards a third class carriage and I followed her.

When the compartment had emptied itself of a collection of khaki, leaving the floor filthy with cigarette ends, etc, she climbed in and I followed her. I offered to put her suitcase in the rack, but she did it herself with graceful ease. I dealt with mine and sat down opposite her. She had taken a mirror from her bag, and was looking at herself in it.

I said, “ Must I apologise for continuing the coincidence ? ”

Her retort was, “ Does the illustrious Mr. Byron travel third ? ”

I smiled at her.

“ On this occasion, yes. Unless ---- ”

“ You are somewhat persistent.”

“ If it offends you, I'll go elsewhere.”

She gave a little shrug of the shoulders and put her mirror away.

"To a point -- it may amuse me."

I got her meaning and the subtle accusation it contained. Colourful aesthetes might be expected to be normal playboys, and just one degree removed from casual cads. Yet, somehow I had a feeling that there was more to it than that. I took up the challenge.

"Please let it amuse you. As you know -- I paint portraits."

"Many portraits."

"Yes."

"And of my sex."

"I do."

"Which means -- I suppose, Mr. Byron that you are considered to have a flair for the feminine."

I was getting the worst of it, but I persisted.

"Sometimes, but only if the subject interests me."

She gave me a quick, ironic look.

"Am I supposed to infer ---- ?"

"You may. I would very much like to paint a particular portrait."

I was given a Mona Lisa smile.

"Portrait of an obscure young woman in a third class compartment, by the first class Mr. Robert Byron."

Certainly I was getting the worst of it.

"Art for art's sake, Miss Mallory. That old platitude is not always -- smug."

"And how would Miss Third Class pay for it ?"

"Might it not be painted for pleasure."

"Your masculine idea of pleasure, Mr. Byron, might not be mine."

She had squashed me. Other people were getting in, and she seemed to sink into her corner and draw aloofness round her. She extracted the magazine, opened it, and used it as a screen. I filled up and lit a pipe.

The compartment now contained six people, ourselves, two tough looking middle aged women who lit cigarettes, and an old couple in the far corner who looked as though they were back from a holiday and had suffered from this dastardly June. I smoked and wondered whence Isolda Mallory had come and whither she was going. And why this hostility? Was I personally responsible for it, or had she some bitter grievance against men? Her magazine hid all of her head save the little gold cap and a wisp of hair. I observed her hands, slender and sensitive, yet strong, and her legs were like her hands in their brownish stockings. Her shoes were of grey suede, and looked shabby.

She had worsted me in the give and take of words, and I divined a quick and vivid vigour in her, and a dignity unusual in these slap-dash days. No easy, simpering minion this, but to my feeling, very much woman who might have reason for wishing to be alone. No rings on her fingers, and certainly no twinkling bells on her toes, no music for men wherever she chanced to go.

The whistle blew and the train moved off. I looked out of the window at all that ugliness rendered yet more ugly by the wet grey sky and the derelict bombed sites left by the war. I could respect the courage of these Londoners who had endured such horrors, and yet wonder how they could be such decent folk in what to me was a hell of hideous materialism. I found myself looking at a relic that somehow fascinated me, on old Dickens Terrace, part of which had vanished save for the sloping walk and steps which had led to houses which were no longer there. Live steps and ghost houses! I could picture some returning soldier ignorant of the tragedy, coming in the darkness to those familiar steps and climbing them to find -- nothing. Where were those houses, with all those memories and their human souvenirs? Did past patterns survive in the Time Scheme, and were those vanished houses still existing in some other dimension?

The train rolled on, and turning my head I surprised her looking at me with appraising and unfriendly eyes. I think I smiled at her and again the magazine went up. Her face vanished like those houses.

One of the tough ladies addressed me.

"Can we have the window down a bit?"

"Certainly."

I lowered it three inches.

"Will that do?"

"Thanks, yes. Horrible weather for this time of year."

"It is."

And there our conversation ended.

But I was thinking of something else. Where will she get out? Surbiton? She did not rhyme with Surbiton. And what is her job in life? To my way of feeling she might have been anything from a member of my own profession, to a film star who was not yet a star. Somebody's secretary? Hardly so. Costumes or hair-dressing? But the quick forcibility with which she had out-tongued me did not seem to accord with such activities.

I smoked my pipe and looked out of the window, but I was strangely conscious of her nearness. That she was no cheap wench whose culture did not extend below her clothes was more and more obvious to me. And what was her history, her background? Had she -- like so many women -- suffered from some sex-treachery and been frozen by it into a profound mistrust of men? I should not have described her as hard, any more than a flower can be described as hard, and yet she had built for herself a fine and delicate shell which only crude violence could crack. Yes, crude violence, or infinite comprehension and integrity.

Surbiton, and she did not move. She had dropped her magazine upon her knees and gazed steadily out of the window. I caught one of the toughs eyeing her with cynical hostility. Like Italy on the Tyrol she had the

fatal gift of beauty which could lure man and antagonise the grosser sort of woman. I glanced at her from time to time and I cannot explain why compassion came to me -- the feeling that there was some tragedy here and that her very aloofness concealed anxiety and fears. She might never show fear, but I could divine it.

Wivelsfield -- my station -- was the next one. I knocked out my pipe and stowed it away. Then I saw her folding up her magazine and tucking it into her bag.

Good God man, was she getting out at my station ?

The train slowed down. I stood up and lifted down my suitcase. She did not move. So, Wivelsfield was not her station, and here the adventure ended.

I opened the door, got out, and raised my hat to her, and reclosed the door. I had walked some twenty yards when some an impulse made me look back. She was getting out of the carriage with her suitcase. She had waited for me to go, so as to close the door upon any more coincidences.

I walked out of the station and found Bill waiting for me with the car, and somehow I was glad of his great round honest face.

" Glad to see you back, sir."

" Glad to be back, Bill."

I did not dare any further contact, but as we drove away I saw her appear with her suitcase and stand waiting. Was some car coming for her, or would a Wivelsfield taxi serve her purpose ?

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The rain had passed, and a break in the sky let the sunlight through upon a wet and glistening world, so green and in its way so sad, were as Thomas Hardy had seen it. I have always held that Surrey, the real Surrey, is the loveliest of the English counties in that its wilderness continues, and because its beauty is so varied. The Downs, the Forest Ridge, its deep and secret valleys, its heaths and rambling rivers, can be so infinitely satisfying both in their remoteness and their human habitations. There are places where the motoring-mob does not spawn litter in every bush, and leave broken glass about, and start devastating fires. I must confess that I do not love the world on wheels, either for its manners, or its cheap exhibitions in the matter of silly speed. A car has its uses, and may be used graciously by the few who have eyes and souls.

The wet sheen was on the woods and meadows. Here some sad optimist had cut the hay and it lay in soaked swatches, but most of it was as yet uncut and drooping in a disorder of wet and wind tossed waves. Now and again a little wayward breeze would bring a scattering of moisture from the trees. Hedge bottoms were lushed up with new green growth. I saw cattle grazing, and the wet glimmer of the woods and meadow spreading into hazed and mysterious distances.

And I still wondered about her, and her glorious head which might have symbolized the goddess Ceres.

Ours was a quiet, secondary road, hardly more than a glorified lane which linked Wivelsfield to Abbotsbridge, but it was old as the Angevins and may have been a Roman trackway. As yet, modernity had not defiled it, and no bathetic boxes lined its winding ways. The road and the river played hide and seek together through the meadows, and I knew that when we came to Hurtfield House, the river would be there like a large mirror

below the garden. I had bought Hurtfield some years ago, because it had fascinated me, and seemed to symbolise all that was old and mysterious and magical, qualities that are so absent from this restless politician plastered world.

We crossed the river by the old brick bridge, and I saw the willows very much weeping willows after the rain. Tall trees, hedge rows, and then the brick corner of the garden wall. Bill had slowed down the car, and I saw something else. A Victorian home called "The Meadows" stood well set back amid trees, in a miniature park across the road. Upon one gate pillar I saw a new and glaring white board.

The Meadows Hotel
and
Country Club

I said to Bill, "What's this? Stop a moment."

He pulled up. The Meadows had been the home of an eccentric old dame who had cultivated cats. I knew that it had been up for sale, and I had not thought much about the matter, and most certainly I had not foreseen this innovation. I was annoyed. I did not welcome one of the new Gin and Giggler shows almost on my doorstep.

"Just opening I think, sir."

"Pretty quick work -- Who's responsible?"

"Gentleman of the name of Horwood, I hear, sir."

"Horwood! -- Don't like the sound of it, Bill. Any people there yet?"

"Only the staff, sir, so far as I know."

We moved in, and the old house welcomed me. It stood there in Tudor stateliness, with a green apron of grass sloping to the river and its two great cedars rising behind it. I had christened them Gay and May. And what a craftsman's home it was, with its beautiful brickwork mellow and

serene, its mouldings and cornices, its lovely gables, lattices, high ornate chimneys, and steeply pitched roof. A goblin house, magical and still mysterious to me.

That Hurtfield had known tragedy was a matter of history, and seemed to linger in its name. Why Hurt -- field? There were no whortleberries here, and I had often wondered whether the Hurt was valid or had been changed from Hart or Heart. And if the name recalled some shred of human anguish, and which was the field that had suffered such angst? But now the old house seemed to stand in a little world of peace, looking out over the river and the meadows, and with the great cedars like benign giants on guard.

Whenever I returned here I had a feeling of escaping into another world, a world in which men still dreamed dreams and ghosts walked and children were told fairy stories, a world of William Shakespeare, Edward Spenser and Kit Marlowe. I had read Mallary here, and listened to Wagner and idealised with William Morris. The material veil could wear very thin, and mysteries return to one's soul, and things miraculous seem ready to manifest when the moon shown. Every house had associations of its own. Queen Bess had slept in my room. From a chamber down the gallery, Sir Roger Lareston had been hauled at night to be tried, condemned and beheaded by Cromwell. The ghost room of Anne Merrill, who had drowned herself in the river, was next to mine and sometimes I fancied that I heard sounds from it. Poor, pretty Anne was supposed to walk the house and like many old houses it was full of queer noises at night. In fact, I am one those who believe that the very walls of a home absorb human happenings and personalities and can exhale them like emanations which may affect those who are sensitive.

I had bought some of the furniture with the house, two four-post beds, tapestry, oak coffees and cupboards, firebacks and andirons, some old

armour and weapons, a crossbow, a lute, and a harpsichord, pewter, and one or two pictures. I had added to its garnishing and since the house was oak and mostly panelled in that wood, I had kept it oak in its main details, tables, chairs, etc. It had a generating plant which had been installed by a previous owner, and I was not so reminiscent as to live with candles. Also, the panelled parlour did permit two large chairs and a sofa to face the fire and screened off in one corner was my piano.

Then, I was fortunate in my staff, Bill and Betty, a young married couple. Betty was a easy little creature, and an excellent cook. Bill had been badly knocked about in the war, and was glad of a job which was not too strenuous and a place in which he was considered. Old Mrs. Mumby came in from a neighbouring cottage and helped Betty, and a gardener named Tim Potter worked in the garden. Yes, in this difficult modern world I was a velvet, and quite the amicable person, but if any enemy of mine assumed that I was a cissy, he right well would have been disillusioned.

As I have said, I cultivated physical fitness and after sitting about all day in the train, I felt the need for exercise. I could get into my outrigged skiff and go sculling, or amuse myself shadow boxing in the studio where a punching ball hung from a beam. Or, I could trot around John Strange's farm, for he allowed me to run when I pleased. I went upstairs and changed into shorts and a light blue vest and pullover. The windows of my room looked out over the river and the meadows, and a sheen of sunlight was upon them.

I met Betty at the foot of the oak staircase.

"Dinner as usual, sir?"

"Yes, Betty, how have things been?"

"Lovely, sir. Mr. Strange sent over half a dozen eggs, and a young rabbit. But you don't like rabbit."

Her little, comely face crinkled up at me. She was a comfortable

creature, and Bill had done well for himself.

“What about one of your omelettes, Betty?”

“Very good, sir.”

As a cook, Betty had luck and some imagination and with the vegetables and fruit we had managed to produce something that was not an English gastronomical insult.

I went over to the studio, an old brick building which had been adapted to the purpose. I think it had once been Hurtfield's brewing and bake house. I had had one wall taken out, and a big north window installed. It was a colourful and spacious room and I could box there with my friend Jim Slaughter and fence with Angelo, who came down once a week. A half-finished picture stood on the easel and I stood and looked at it and remembered that somehow the inspiration had failed in me. Ophelias floating in the river, and Ophelia had refused to manifest in the flesh.

Then, I remembered -- Her. She must have been very much there in my inner chamber of conscious, and she had but to draw back the curtain. Could I paint her as I had seen her and still saw her? Why not? Though the Isolda of Paddington Station was no Ophelia, but more a Brunhilda or a Valkyrie. And yet -- in her younger, gentler days she might have passed for that tragic creature, a child of the Rosetti period before a competitive and bellicose age had made women more tough and tigerish.

Well, why should I not try it soon. She was very vivid to me, and would remain so, even though she was the creature of a passing dream.

Still feeling the need for exercise, I decided to proceed to John Strange's farm for a trot. Just as I was leaving the Hurtfield gate, I saw the rump of a taxi disappearing through that other gate at The Meadows, but I thought nothing of it.

It was an easy jog to the west down the road and over the brick bridge. Then, the wet fields and meadows lay before me on both sides of the road. In

the distance of the north fields, I could see a solitary figure posed rather like a scarecrow in the middle of a hayfield. It was poor old John Strange contemplating June's havoc, and the tangle rain and gale had made of his hay crop. I climbed a field gate and went walking towards him.

He was very much the old world, and looking rather like a melancholy goat with the tuft of hair in his chin and his Pan-like face. His shoulders drooped, and his pale blue eyes were vacant. Ever the gumboots he was wearing looked down at heel. I liked old John Strange, for he suggested some gentle old horse with no back left in him and this was the third most difficult summer nature had inflicted upon him.

"Hello, John."

He gave me a half quizzical smile, for even in the thick of a ruined hay crop I must have been a singular figure to him.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Byron."

"Hope I've brought you better weather."

He gave a slight shrug of the shoulders. His philosophy was that of a simple soul who went regularly to church, and accepted what God gave him.

"Well, maybe August will be better. I've got these good fields of wheat and barley. They be looking lovely. If I'd had the sense and the money I'd have built a silo."

I looked across the fields at the river and saw The Meadows on the other side, standing very white and refreshed in its park. The taxi I had seen was just leaving it, and a bright red sports car was parked by the pillared porch. The house belonged to that period when the mock French chateau style was in favour. It did not sit down in the good earth, but posed like some affected spinster at a garden party. In fact, it represented all that was unlikeable in the Victorian age, a stilted and complacent formalism. Its very chimneys posed like evangelical gentlemen in top hats and frock coats. I had always thanked God that a belt of trees smudged it out from

the road, so far as Hurtfield was concerned.

“ Know anything of the new people over there, John ? ”

He did not and did not want to.

His poor depressed figure and the sodden fields seemed to deflate my desire for trotting exercise. The river was more welcoming, and I turned back to Hurtfield with the idea of getting out my skiff and sculling a mile or two. I crossed the bridge and as I was approaching Hurtfield, the gateway of The Meadows provoked me. Why shouldn't I stroll in and have a look round ? I did so, and was close to the house when a man came out of the park and opened the door of the red sports car. It was the kind of car I associated with speed-cads.

He saw me, slammed the door to, and stood waiting for me.

I will confess that I disliked the fellow from the first glance. He was a large and powerful looking brute, with a quite absurd resemblance to a certain notorious cabinet-minister. He had a low forehead with a streak of black hair slanting across over it, a heavy round face with bulging cheeks, and supial double chin and blatant blue eyes. To me he simply stank of fat arrogance and alcohol though he could not have been very much older than I was. His clothes were melodramatic purple corduroys, a green shirt, and a dark blue jacket.

He said to me, “ Can I be of any help to you ? ”

But there was truculence even in his courtesy. Was this greasy flamboyant tough the new owner of The Meadows ? If so I had received a lurid neighbour.

“ Are you Mr. Horwood ? ”

“ I am.”

“ I was just looking round.”

I was to discover that Major Harold Horwood was no mere bounding bully. He had a quick tongue and some wit, and when needs be he could play the

suave gentleman. He had been looking me over with those blatant blue eyes that seemed sunken in a splodge of fat, and they were not friendly eyes.

“ Have you seen far, sir ? ”

So he was being facetious. My costume was not exactly night-club.

“ About a hundred yards -- I happen to be a neighbour.”

Then he smiled at me, and I did not like his smile.

“ Of course. Mr. Robert Byron -- I believe.”

I nodded, and he put out a large hand.

“ Honoured -- I'm sure -- to have so notable a neighbour.”

I took his hand and gripped it hard, and I was surprised at the grip he gave me in return. About -- it was like a challenge in a trial of strength between us.

“ You'll excuse me, Mr. Byron, but I have to get back to town. I just ran down to see how they were going. We are not open yet.”

He flipped a large hand at me, and opened the door of the red car.

“ Good morning, sir.”

I smiled at him and thought -- “ You cheeky bounder.”

Isolda's Diary

I was rather amused by the day's adventure. I suppose many women would have got a thrill from travelling with the celebrated Mr. Robert Bryon. Interesting looking person and of course he knows it. Moreover, he has cultivated a good method of approach, the bewitched shy boy idea. He accents with décor and a kind of gentlemanly eagerness. Oh, Damn man ! I think nothing over ten is tolerable in trousers.

I wonder how I am going to like this place ? My window here pleases me, high up in a kind of slated gable turret which the Victorians conceived to be French. The meadows and the river and the Down up yonder, and plenty of sky.

The Horwood man does look rather a pirate, but he seems considerate, and knew that I should cooperate. I shall to a point. We are to be both smart and reposeful. And there shall be good money here if one has the right sort of smile for the elderly gentlemen who want to feel less than forty.

Yes, money to be saved for -- her. I think she is the only completely clean thing I have in the world. She shan't have to experience some of her mother's problems. I'm pretty tough now, and life isn't a Fun Fair.

I have been all over the house, and its décor is rather clever. The bar pleases me with its coloured glass and air of seductive gaiety. Here I shall preside. I am to dispense drinks and allure, play hostess at times, and exude general charm. In fact, Mr. Horwood admits that he held a kind of glamour parade before I was selected.

Am I flattered ? No, I know enough about men.

And Major Harold Horwood ? Rather a buccaneer - I imagine. Fat and florid and full of manners. Might have played a part in " Bittersweet ". Oh, Vienna, city of shadows and sadness ! I think I know how to manage a man like Horwood. Complete calmness, casual humour, a quip now again

from the tip of your tongue.

We had dinner together, quite friendly and conversational. He dropped some hints to me. The Meadows is to be a super play house for the wealthy. What kind of play ? I have seen the card-room. It has shutters and heavy curtains. Horwood seems pretty confident about the whole business. I wonder ?

Only a part of the staff has joined us as yet. The chef is Polish and judging by the dinner -- an expert. I gather that the appeal is to the flesh, but discretely so.

I am afraid nothing shocks one these days. The world has had too many shocks.

Horwood gives me a piece of news which annoys me. The Byron man has a house just across the way. I hope the fellow is not going to be a philandering nuisance.

I have written to Rita and Mary Payelly. I shall have to be careful about these letters. Part of my life is too poignantly private.

I believe the child will be happy with those good people. Are there any good people ? I suppose there must be, or the world would have gone up in smoke.

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My contact with Horwood had put me in a more contemplative mood and I neither ran nor sculled, but went and wandered about the Hurtfield garden. I even helped myself like a boy to some strawberries that were ripe under their protective netting. Maybe, Mr. Horwood's quizzical appraisal of my country costume had made me conscious of myself as a creature who could indulge in self-ostentation. Had he summed me up as a sort of Chelsea inhabitant, a colourful cissy who was not quite male? I will admit that I did not conform to conventional standards in the matter of dress, but if I had a liking for colour in my clothes it was just part of my artistry. I could have enjoyed myself among the peacocks of the Elizabethan court, for there was colour in that period, drama and great culture. If I wore a purple velvet coat and amber coloured trousers in the evening, it did not mean that I was Forever Amber or a species of hermaphrodite.

I wandered into the studio and looked at my unfinished picture. The background was there, but the floating figure remained a vague splodge. It had baffled me, and I suppose there is a peevish puckishness in every artist which can provoke him into poking fun at his more solemn self. In fact, I had dabbed a splodge of vermilion on the floating figure's face, and that childish gesture reminded me of a thing Siegbert Gladwyne the novelist had said to me. "One gets stuck sometimes, and then I write. ' Bash, bash, bash, bloody bash ' across my manuscript. It seems to have a tonic effect. Or perhaps an emetic one. And bash to you, my lad!" Yes, Siegbert Gladwyne could be a refreshing person.

I had no portrait in prospect for the moment. I now accepted half a dozen or so commissions a year, for a successful craftsman is penalised as severely as the merchant or the stockbroker and even more so because his

craft lays on the cunning of one's individual hand.

I had saved money, and that according to the politicians -- was another crime against the community. I had even been asked by my Inspector of Taxes to explain the fall in my income, and I had answered in one word -- "You!" I did most of my portraits in the winter sharing my friend Jim Masters' studio in Chelsea, for Jim Masters so loathed the English winter that he fled to South Africa or Bermuda. So, at Hurtfield I gave myself to imaginary and romantic stuff, and painted for my own personal pleasure. I was quite prepared to chouse the tax mongers by giving my work away after exhibiting it -- if I chose to do so.

The vermilion splodge upon the face of the floating Ophelia was a challenge and a provocation. Almost I could hear Siegbert Gladwyne saying to me "You have gone ga-ga over a girl, and lost yourself in a pretty face which won't stand water." Why was it that the pique went out of one's craft and left you feeling bored and shabby? But now, as I stood there, I realised that I had a face for my Ophelia, if -- I could reproduce it from memory.

So provoked was I that I got out a sketching block and sat down with the thing on my knees, and tried roughing in a profile, but somehow the result did not please me. She had appeared so vivid to me and now -- ever in so short a time -- her features had become vague and elusive. But -- why? One's interpretation of a particular subject may -- sometimes -- be baffling and curiously incomplete. It was as though some element was missing in one's self, the subtle inward rendering of the soul behind the face. Was it that I had not grasped the more mysterious significance of her? Perhaps? Often, I had found myself baffled by some subject that had appeared obvious to my eyes, but elusive when I had sought to express it on canvas.

I was frowning at the study I had made, when Bill appeared at the studio

door.

"Dinner, sir."

"Hello, Bill, did the bell ring?"

"Yes, sir."

I had not heard it.

Dinner over, I lit a pipe and strolled out into the garden. An old red brick garden house was tucked away at the end of the terrace and overlooking the river. It was a very special haunt of mine for reading or contemplation and I lay down in a lawn chair, and saw my particular tree posed against the evening sky.

It was a Cedar, and though it did not belong to me, but grew in John Strange's land across the river, it had a peculiar fascination for me. Its spired head did not spear up straight into the air, but slanted westwards like a green-black hand, and when I saw it I was conscious of a quite unexplainable thrill. There was mystery in this distant tree. It might have soared upwards in the hazed glamour of some old Italian picture, and its moods varied like man's. It could be very black or shining in the sunlight, sometimes dim, sometimes very vivid. Almost it and I seemed to share in a mystical communion. I could talk to that tree and it had answers for me. Few people would understand such fanciful fooling, but an imaginative and sensitive child might have felt as I did. I called the tree "Merlin."

On this June evening the tree seemed to glow. Its slanting top was a pointer, and it had for me -- direction. Almost I could see it signalling to me. "Search and you shall find." I sat up suddenly. What was I searching for? The face of the dead Ophelia in my picture.

My questioning of the problem became actual. That Botticelli face was the face I needed. Whither had she gone, and how could I find her? Advertise in the "Times"?

“ Will the lady who shared a taxi from Paddington to Waterloo, and who travelled to Wivelsfield in June -- please communicate with ---- ”

No, much too obvious and conventional. Moreover, judging by her air of sustained aloofness, I should be favoured with no response. Was there not a more subtle approach ? I could explore, send Bill to sound the Wivelsfield taxi men. They did not number more than half a dozen, and Bill knew most of them.

That tree of mine was pointing me to action. Its gesture seemed to say “ Get up, you dreamer, and walk. And face reality. Is it a face in a picture that is luring you -- or -- romance ? ” Isolda, not a mere dream of Ophelia !

My tree was pointing along the river. I wandered out the gates, down the road, crossed the bridge, and climbed a gate which led into one of John Strange's fields. The grounds of The Meadows sloped down to the river and just above the bank, an old rustic summerhouse stood sheltered by a great clump of rhododendrons. Some of them were still in flower, magenta, carmine, white, glowing like lamps in the slanting sunlight. And then, I saw that someone was sitting in the summerhouse.

Now, even after a day of such coincidences -- the old tag did apply. I could hardly believe my eyes. She was sitting there with the sunlight shining upon her and lighting up her glorious hair. She was wearing the same dress, but it seemed to have taken on a tinge of amber in the evening light. She sat quite still, utterly still as though she had been contemplating this most English scene, and then -- I -- had walked in to the picture and became -- perhaps -- a quite superfluous figure in it. We were less than forty yards from each other, with the river between us.

I was still in shorts, singlet and pullover, and my first absurd impulse was to jump in and swim across to her. Had she recognised me ? I raised an arm in a Roman salute, and her reaction was what I should have expected it

to be for the way she had chided me at Wivelsfield. She was to her feet, walked out of the summerhouse and up the grassy slope and I was suffered to watch her uncompromising back. She crossed the gravelled space and disappeared into the white pillared porch, and I was left with the landscape.

Now, I will confess that I was not a little peeved.

What the devil was she doing there ?

And with that swarthy and bumptious cad ?

Was she the Country Club's first guest ?

But Horwood had said that the place was not yet open to visitors.

Was she his wife -- or -- something more -- dubious ?

I turned and walked back along the river to the bridge. No, I was not pleased, not at all pleased. My tree Merlin had pointed me to a situation that was more provocative than the mere painting of a picture.

Isolda's Diary

Drat the man ! I was enjoying a few minutes solitude in the garden when he appeared on the other side of the river in shorts and a bright blue vest. Rather ridiculous ! He stood there, posing, and then gave me a kind of Hitler salute.

A Hitler salute -- of all things ! If any woman has good cause to hate that hysterical brute -- I have.

Colourful idiot -- And what is the idea of a man of forty running about like an Olympic hero ? He must be close on forty, one of man's silly periods when he wants to prove to himself and some wench that he can be young and lusty.

I was peeved. I just got up and made a casual return to the house.

If Mr. Robert Byron needs snubbing -- I think I can do it.

And hysteria ? Who was the old fool who coined that word and pinned it on woman like a broach.

Is not modern man in the mass about as hysterical as an intoxicated baboon. What of his wretched politics, and his mob oratory, and his war and his killings. I can remember that Nazi mob in poor Vienna. Stupid, screaming faces ----

Woman hysterical ? My God !

Moreover, man always claims the right to a kind of royal solitude when his mighty brain proposes to do a bit of thinking.

Silence, to be alone with yourself just for five minutes when life can be like gabble from the B.B.C.

I suppose my vanity -- such as it was -- had received a credible chastening and yet I was not a particularly vain creature. The true craftsman is not, for there is in his makeup, a streak of that divine humility which is spiced with humour.

Life had been pretty kind to me. What is more, I had consorted with men who could do other things supremely well, and far better than I could. Jimmy Slaughter might box with me, but had I faced the real Jimmy Slaughter in a fight, I would have been slaughtered. Also, Angelo with a foil was much more than a match for me. Even in my Henley days, I had never got beyond the semi-final of the Diamond Sculls. Always there had been a man who was just a bit better than I was.

Yes, more than mere male vanity was involved in the adventure. Had I misread her completely and could she choose to cavort with a fellow like Horwood and turn her back upon Mr. Robert Byron ?

As I have hinted, I had my affairs with women and though they had taught me much they have failed to flower into finality. Somehow -- like a romantic boy I had always believed that someday I should meet the unique creature whose power to hold me would be utter.

I will confess that I prompted Bill to find out what he could about The Meadows, without -- of course -- any reference to Isolda Mallory. He did obtain some information from gossip at " The Green Man ", when a fellow who was working in The Meadows' garden dropped in at night. The excuse I gave to Bill was that I should not welcome noisy neighbours. All that he could find out was that most of the staff were in residence, a Polish chef, two Italian waiters, two chambermaids -- one of whom was Hungarian. There was no reference to Isolda Mallory. It was said the club was to be partly residential and would open the following week.

It seemed a very mixed bag to me, with a Soho flavour and I was puzzled by the part she was to play there. Could she be that cad's mistress? I resented the very suggestion with a heat that rather astonished me. Well, what was her role to be, house-keeper, dance hostess, a creature of allure? But her coolness to me, and her remote dignity seemed to negate any such hired glamour.

The river was free to me and I took my skiff out and reconnoitred the house from the river and all that I saw was a large green van delivering what appeared to be crates of liquor -- supplies for the club bar. Two fellows in short-sleeves were helping the van man in with the cases. Both of them were smoking cigarettes, and chatting to each other in a language I took to be Italian. I saw no sign of her, nor did Horwood's red car show up while I was at the river.

Then, I had a piece of luck. Jimmy Slaughter arrived in his Laganda, and found me loafing in the studio. I had been doing some shadow-boxing and I did not see him for the moment. I was standing staring at that unfinished picture.

"Hello, sir. How goes it?"

I was never more glad of a visitor, and of Jimmy Slaughter, in particular. Fighting-man he might be, with that rugged, flattened face, but I think he was about the sweetest tempered creature I had known -- ever.

When he fought, it was with a smile, or an ironic grin which can be depressing to an adversary, especially so if the other fellow had lost his temper. He looked at me and he looked at the unfinished picture, and his big, swarthy boy's face teased me. Then I remembered that he had seen that picture, before, and that the face was still an anonymous blur. Jimmy -- heavy-weight that he was -- could be as sharp as a freshly stropped razor.

I grinned at him.

"Yes, face is still missing, James."

"That's not usual with you, sir."

"Just how?"

"You generally find the lady."

I smacked his face. I had an affection for Jimmy.

"You are staying to lunch. We can manage. Betty always prepares something from somewhere. Sherry or gin?"

He shook his head at me.

"I've been training again. Beer with food sir. I see you've got some new kind of neighbour. I had a hog's match with some fellow who blew in there."

"Red sports car?"

"Yes, tried to play puss with me coming from the village. Afraid I did him down."

I had a sudden idea. Jimmy Slaughter got about town a good deal, and was familiar with the life of London. So he and Mr. Horwood had had a hogging match, and the big Lagunda had wiped the red car's eye.

"Jimmy ----"

"Yes, sir?"

"Sit down, man. Ever met a fellow named Horwood?"

"Horwood? Calls himself a Major. Name of Harold?"

"I'm not sure about the Harold. Good Nordic name, but not to my fancy. All the Harolds I have met ----"

Jimmy had squatted on a chair, with his arms crossed on the back of it. He was frowning, and when James Slaughter frowned, cheeky, cads-about-town took notice.

"Big, bumptious beast. The fellow in the red car was Horwood."

"Gosh -- I thought his pug was a bit familiar. Yes, I once bashed it."

This was becoming more than interesting and I sat down on a stool opposite Jimmy.

“ Ever heard of ‘ The Ace of Hearts ’, sir ? ”

“ Vaguely.”

“ Super night-club in town. Horwood ran it -- and rumour has it that he got into trouble and had to close.”

“ And how did you fall out with him.”

“ Oh, one of his gigolos chucked me, and I just gave him one. Then Horwood blew in.”

“ Poor innocent louse. Well, that is my new neighbour.”

Jimmy felt for a pipe and a pouch. He half filled the pipe and lit it. When in training he cut his tobacco to vanishing point, but this appeared to be a pipe occasion.

“ Not a nice neighbour. I think I get the idea. Soho became a bit too hot for Horwood. What about a nice quiet place in the country where the police might not be interested ? Drink and adulating and a bit of gambling for the nobs with money to burn. All the yellow girls and the fat old stallions. Might be made to look so nice and respectable.”

I will admit that I was shocked. We are not exactly squeamish people in these Forever Amber days, but there are certain activities that can produce nausea in the healthiest tough. Fastidiousness, may be a somewhat rare virtue, but the world of Jimmy Slaughter’s Yellow Girls, and fat old stallions was utterly loathsome to me. And what was She doing in this ménage ? Did she know ---- ? Would Jimmy have classed her among the Yellow Girls ? Something in me revolted at the idea. No, damn it, she just could not know.

I too had lit a pipe, for something to bite upon seemed necessary.

I said -- “ Jimmy, I think I shall join Mr. Horwood’s Country Club.”

He stared hard at me.

“ What’s the idea ? ”

“ Supervision, my lad. I’m a respectable person in these parts, and I

could agitate -- if necessary."

He grinned at me.

"Mind you don't get into a rough house."

"Would Mr. Harold Horwood want a rough house? I rather think not -- besides ---- "

He nodded and his grin broadened.

"Harold might get a shock -- You've got a pretty good right to the chin."

I grinned back at him.

"It wouldn't hurt my conscience to use it."

II

What is our conscience? A sense of inner cleanliness that is developed by certain disciplines and likings and dislikings? We are patchwork people and the frailties of the flesh follow us through the years to become chastened in old age, if old age has discovered how to grow inwardly serene. Yes, beauty, that mysterious quality which manifests like God only to the chosen few. There can be beauty in negation, the Thou Shalt Not of the old ritual. Ritual, tradition -- what the moderns call background. Man should strive to cherish a ritual of his own, to be clean in body and sound of heart, something of a fighter, fastidious in the flesh, and capable of transcending cowardice and greed. There is no greatness without some greatness of spirit, and belief in the essential dignity of life, if life is to be worth living.

Platitudinous -- perhaps, but dignity is a quality that is but little considered in these democratic days. Who asks if the baker's rounds-man or the garage-hand have dignity? Does the modern bungalow express it? Is the spirit of Shakespeare dead in us, because the spite and envy of the little man will not tolerate Shakespearean figures? We seem to be so

small these days because mass man resents personal property and cherishes his littleness like a utility, mass-made suit.

I was in a self-critical mode after Jimmy Slaughter had left me. I seemed to be reaching for some symbol that eluded me. Was anything worthwhile? Was my whole attitude to life a pose, the product of an obsolete Seville Row pattern? And now, I was becoming interested in a young woman who appeared to be part of a most dubious and septic establishment.

And then I happened to find myself alone in the old house. Betty and Bill were having half a day off and Hurtfield was wholly mine. But how much mine? Did not such a house belong to itself and to history? I wandered up the oak stairs, running a hand along the polished rail and feeling the old timber staunch and solid under my feet. If the house had an entity of its own, a spirit, that something had me by the hand. I strolled in and out of rooms, looked out of windows, touched familiar things and suddenly I became conscious of Hurtfield as more than a mere house, a collection of birch and tiles and timber. It was life itself, a mysterious integration of human happenings that was still somewhere in the Time Pattern, and might manifest to some hyper-creative soul. It had known pain, and joy, and lust and love, sorrow and despair, loyalty and persistence. It contained all the complexity of a human spirit. Yet, there was something more -- compassion. Almost, I could feel the ultimate wisdom of the man's creation, which had absorbed all that was man, laying a calm and gentle hand upon my head. And it had a voice for me. "I have housed man and woman and little children, good and evil, love and lust, greed and generosity, pain and passion. Yes, I have known all that man can do and feel, and in my old age serenity has come to me. And the ultimate good? Compassion, kindness, a belief in the beneficence of beauty, dignity, gracious thinking."

I sat down at the window of the Queen's Room, and the sun streamed in on me, and out yonder the world was very fresh and green. How beautiful was

nature, and eternally removed and manifesting in lovely youth ! And man could make so sordid and shabby a parody of it all. Reclusion ? Were those old anchorites wiser in their withdrawing from the world of men ? Was God to be found only in the woods and fields, upon the mountains, and in the green valleys ?

Yes, man seemed to have lost his true appetite for life. His was a drugged world, and so stale and shut-up was his senses in a material and sensual prison-house that he had to out-sot himself with false sensations. His world was a Chemist's shop, pub, a cinema, and cigarette smoke. The worlds tongue was fussed, and Mr. Horwood's Palace of Delight might be a house of fussed tongues.

What was she doing there ?

III

I went down and wandered about the garden and into the studio and there that unfinished picture with its blank face confronted me. Why was I at a loss to give Ophelia her face ? Was there some profound significance in my hesitation ? The water and the willows and the grasses and the water-weeds move there, shadow and sunlight and the eternal mystery which was inherent in nature, but the face of which would not manifest. Did that mean that I was blind about woman and about Her ? Was some secrete comprehension lacking in me ? I had known woman as a lovely lure, but not as Shakespeare had portrayed her in her inward beauty, her graciousness, her dignity.

I strolled down to the river, sat on the bank under a willow, and tried to project myself into what I saw, as artists do. There should be more than man in it, more than a mere sex-pattern. I realise now that I was trying to see her in it, as she was, and as she would float upon those still waters.

And suddenly I had a sense of tragedy, of unhappy fateful things, almost of crucifixion. Had life laid a ruthless hand upon her, and was her remoteness protective -- her unfriendliness a defensive mask ?

So absorbed was I in this other picture that I did not hear the luncheon bell, and when I did hear, it was old Mrs. Mamby peevishly searching for a gentlemen who had no sense of time.

“ Drat the man, where ‘as he got to ? -- Hallo, sir, where are you ? ”

I got to my feet and climbed the bank.

“ Sorry, Mrs. Mamby. I must have gone to sleep -- sitting.”

I had good cause to remember the weekend when The Meadows opened. I gather that Horwood must have made of it an official occasion, and that the white house was welcoming all patrons and friends. It was no Field of the Cloth of Gold. It might have been a Brooklands race-meeting in the good old days. Cars snorted and swarmed into the place, every sort of car, including one or two London taxis. Loud voices, laughter, and the banging of doors and a giggley hubbub that seemed incessant. It happened to be a fine, still evening, and yellow umbrellas had been pitched on the lawn and people were taking their little drinks there, served by the two dago waiters. The south window of the Hurtfield gallery commanded The Meadow's gate, and I will admit that I stood there for a while watching this glorious invasion.

As I have said, it was a still evening when sounds travel, and though Hurtfield stood back fifty yards from the road, the place seemed to shudder with all that mechanical pother. I am hyper-sensitive to noise and Hurtfield had been a country house, unvexed by discord, and at night its peace was utter. You might hear an owl hooting, or the sound in the willows or a faint smitting as the river sleeked its way towards the sea and stirred the water-flies and sedges. So peaceful were the nights that I was intensely resentful over the hubbub over yonder. My anger carried me out to my own gate and there I found a big black limousine parked with its rump about touching the old iron gate.

It contained a chauffeur who was sprawling in the back seat and smoking a cigarette and preparing -- I presume -- to pass the waiting hours in slumber.

I said "Do you mind moving your car from my gate."

He sat up. He was capless, a nasty, impudent looking fellow, and typical

of the blue coated and trousered tribe one sees loafing in the West End.

“What’s wrong with it being here? -- Full up over there.”

“You are blocking my gate.”

“Want to come out?”

“That’s not the question.”

“You don’t own the earth, gov’ner.”

“This happens to be part of my property. You move that car.”

He gave me an impudent smirk, and lolled back again with the cigarette adhering to his lower lip. I put my hand to the door handle, and then I saw a friend of mine bearing down on us, P.C. Gates, the local constable. He was a tall, fair, very likeable lad, and he had manners.

“Any trouble, sir?”

“This car is blocking my gate, and the driver refuses to move it.”

“Ses -- you,” came a voice from within, “So -- what?”

P.C. Gates came and stood beside me. He had a pleasant, quiet voice and there was nothing of the bully in him.

“Now then -- move the car.”

“What for? I’m the right side of the gent’s gate.”

“You’re on private property, and obstructing the owner.”

The man sat up. He spat his words at me.

“Private property -- what! There won’t be any bloody private property in this damned country -- when ---- ”

P.C. Gates opened the door.

“You are going to move this car, brother, or I shall have to go across and warn your boss -- Come on, get going.”

“Oh, -- bloody well -- all right. It’s full up over there.”

“You can park on that grass verge.”

“Can I? -- Bloody considerate of you.”

P.C. Gates was looking quietly grim.

“ And you can mind your manners too, my lad, if you have any -- I suppose you’re one of those chaps who are polite only when they’re paid to be.”

P.C. Gates had said it, but the fellow put on his cap, and still smoking his cigarette, got in to the driving seat and moved the car on to the grass verge across the way.

“ Look, Tom,” said I, for he was Tom to me, “ We seem to have collected a nice crowd.”

“ Not so nice, sir, if you ask me. You could have bought that chap for half a crown.”

P.C. Gates continued his patrol, and I -- having been somewhat stimulated by the incident, strolled across to The Meadows entrance. I had read somewhere that the British police constable is a peculiar mixture of kindness and suspicion, and that he is taught to cultivate manners and few illusions. His remark upon the easy purchase of politeness had piqued me, and I reflected that during most of the period of man’s life upon this planet the Have-Nots have played up to the Haves and take it out in sneers behind the backs of princes and princesses. Just stark necessity and the bitter human reaction. Yet, surely, in these days, the new lords of creation might shed some of their spite. But necessity still remained for many, those who do not parade in measured formation. Necessity? I stood for a moment between the white gate-pillars. Was some stark necessity compelling her to play a part in this House of Illusions?

I strolled in. Cars were parked everywhere, and most of these were opulent vehicles. The lawns had emptied and Mr. Horwood’s patrons had passed in to dinner. I heard an orchestra playing and I stood to listen. Tchaikovsky’s “ Sleeping Beauty ” waltz. Now, I am sentimental about music and this particular melody always has magic for me, and at the moment it seemed to express some other conception. It wreathed its romantic movements about my picture of Her. Was she -- perhaps -- a sleeping

beauty, drugged into acquiescence by some necessity that I had not fathomed ?

I strolled on, and found myself opposite the French window of what was the dining room. The orchestra had finished its waltz and in place of the music, I heard voices, the over-stimulated gabble, and vivacity of people who were already well oiled. I had glimpses of men in dinner jackets, and women in evening frocks. There was vulgarity here, and giggly frothiness. And then I realised that I had been observed by a party at a particular table. I was in my plain-coloured velvet jacket, and amber trousers, and I suppose I must have been a colourful joke to these revellers. I heard a woman say -- "Look at Oscar !" A fat fellow who was wiping a moustache with his serviette, twiddled the fingers of his other hand at me. "Evening, sir -- how is Chelsea ?" I smiled at them and then turned away.

I walked down to the river, and there I discovered something that did not please me, a new landing stage, and three punts moored to it. Was the river to be invaded by Mr. Horwood's weekend crowd ?

But my own dinner was waiting for me, and that other world which was mine, yet it was not to be wholly mine on that summer evening. I am an early bird so far as bed is concerned, but my sleep was not to be Arcadian. The sounds of that hilarious frolic reached me, and when I did doze off, I was yanked back to wakefulness by banging doors, loud exclamations and laughter, the starting up of engines and the fire and fury the wretched things produced as they departed through The Meadows gates. Even the beam of headlights glared across my window.

I lay and cursed that crowd. I was too wide awake now and feeling more like action than slumber. Moreover, I realized that a moon was shining, serene and steadfast, and not like these damned headlights. I flung out of bed, got into some clothes, made my way down the oak stairs, and out into the garden. It was sleek and still in the moonlight, the cedars were black

marble, and the old house standing with all its windows dimly glittering. Had those fools over yonder seen the moon and the meadows, and the mysterious vistas playing into darkening woods ? Perhaps some of them had seen two moons !

Somehow I wanted action, and the urge was positive. I passed out by the iron gates and across the road, and through that other gate. In the moonlight the white house looked like some pretentious piece of iced confectionary and the yellow umbrellas like great fungi. Some windows were still alive and two of them were on the ground floor. I crossed the lawns and the drive, and the crepe soled shoes I was wearing made no sound in the gravel. I slid along the wall to the lighted windows. They were open.

I found myself looking into the club bar, and at two figures, one slumped on a high stool, the other standing behind the bar counter.

Isolda.

So that was her job here, hostess and bar-lady. She was in an amber coloured frock, and the light played upon her hair, and to me her face had a kind of tired deadness.

The man was Horwood. When he spoke to her I recognised his voice.

" Well, not a bad first night, my sweet. -- I think I'll have a last one."

I shall never forget the way she looked at him. She remained absolutely still.

" We are -- closed -- Mr. Horwood. Past midnight."

He appeared to waggle his backside in the stool.

" Have a heart darling. You -- me -- nature. No snoopers about ---- "

She answered with curious calmness.

" You can help yourself. I have finished for tonight."

" Oh, come along. I'm a bit well oiled, I know. But why should you and I finish -- except in ---- "

He never said what he might have been meaning to say, for she saw me, and I had meant her to see me. I often wonder what her inward reaction was, but I had a feeling then that I had saved her from -- well -- what? I don't think I quite realized till afterwards that my showing myself at the window was to give both of us a chance to betray the significance of the occasion. It gave her the chance and the choice and her choosing was instant.

"There is someone out there."

Horwood's large and greasy black head went up. I think he gave her an angry glare, but she was not looking at him, but at me.

Horwood swung round on his stool, and as he did so, I saw one of her hands move in a little swaying gesture. I side-stepped and waited. Horwood came pounding to the window. I heard his voice, turgid and menacing.

"Who's there?"

I stepped back into the light. He was leaning out, and his large face was flushed and angry. But I saw more than this. She had gone. She had taken the chance my intervention had given her.

"Good evening, Mr. Horwood -- Having a merry night?"

He glared at me.

"Mr. Byron -- I think."

"Quite so. You were so merry, that I found bed superfluous -- and I took a stroll."

I could divine his anger, but he chose to suppress it. Maybe he thought discretion advisable.

"You are not a club-member, sir."

"Am I trespassing?"

"Well, we are not supposed to admit non-members. Certain regulations, you know."

I smiled at the empty room behind him. He had yet to discover that she

was no longer there.

“ I shall have to remedy that, Mr. Horwood. I should very much like to join your club -- I get rather bored sometimes -- with too much -- country.”

I could feel him appraising both me and the suggestion. Maybe it did not please him. And then he decided to be polite and consenting.

“ I am sure it will be an honour, sir.”

“ Thank you. Err -- goodnight, Mr. Horwood.”

And I left him to discover the emptiness behind him.

Isolda's Diary

So this is our supersonic Country Club ! I am pretty tough, but I don't like the waiter, or the orchestra, or the patrons, particularly some of the patrons. The whole crowd might have been exported from the most sinister of Soho Night Clubs. I have seen one or two in my time, and I know.

Not only tarnish, but greasy tarnish.

Some of the patrons are not too bad, sort of eager amateurs who think they are seeing life.

But some of the oldish men, silly old satyrs -- and pretty sinister ! The Pinch Your Backside Brigade. Yes, I am being vulgar ; it is sometime good to be wholesomely vulgar. And how these fools drink. They drank our whiskey dry on the first night, and then passed on to gin or brandy.

I have been standing for hours, trying to look bright. Feet aching. Yes, and some backache. If I happened to be an ugly wench, I should not have to sell drinks and allure. How many times was I asked to have one ? And I didn't. Collected quite a pocket of plunder.

One has to hold on to something ? I have something. I make myself see a child's face shining like a clean moon over all those silly, boozing phizzers. It helps.

And I am not so pleased with Mr. Harold Horwood. Too much liquor. Too much the bold buccaneer. Did he think when he hired me I should be easy.

To me the worst sort of skunk is the man who assumes that your job includes going to bed with him.

Maybe he was just too razzled.

And what was Mr. Robert Byron doing snooping about in those colourful clothes ? Rather a mysterious person. But he did me a good turn in distracting the Assyrian Bull, and giving me a chance to get out of the arena.

I locked my door.

Heavens, how good bed was ! No silly faces, and no aching feet.

This English summer was proving as dastardly as the political situation, but Mr. Horwood's first weekend happened to be a fierce one. The Sunday began for me with a letter which Bill brought me while I was shaving.

"Found this in the letter-box, sir."

I finished shaving before I opened the letter. It was from Horwood. He regretted to have to tell me that to become a Club member it was necessary for me to be proposed and seconded by two other members. Regret it -- did he? There was no evidence of him wishing to help in the matter.

Well, that situation could be explored. The Meadows called itself a hotel as well as a Country Club, and if I demanded a meal without alcohol I gathered that Horwood would have to serve me. I was all for attack after that most significant scene of the previous night. That sort of cad might regard a comely lovely's part as a dual one, to exercise glamour both behind the bar and in bed. I had always felt more than contempt for the male exploiter who bought pressure to bear upon any desirable woman who had a career or a job which depended upon her pleasing him, and I could gauge the bitterness of any fastidious girl who found herself exposed to that sort of blackguardian. Physical allure might be a curse to her, and Isolda Mallory had that allure.

Why had she taken a job of this description? Just grim necessity? And perhaps she had not known her Horwood? Was I being a sentimental fool about her? What did I know of her past, or her present? And yet, had she been out for some profitable adventure, she had shown no desire to exercise it at my expense. No, damn it, I could not visualise her as a debauched beauty whom a cynical world had persuaded to accept tarnish.

After breakfast and a pipe, I went down to the boathouse and got out my

skiff. I was in rowing togs and I started sculling up-stream, under the bridge and then past The Meadows. One or two people were sitting in deck chairs on the lawn, and I appeared to arouse their interest. Probably a fellow in light blue vest and shorts who was something of an expert as a sculler must have been unexpected on such quiet water. The rhythm of good oarsmanship has always delighted me, its svelte swagger and cleanness and strength. Moreover, I was to chuckle on this Olympic year over the ironic results of Britain's efforts. The only British capabilities to claim first were Snoke and Toffs, wearers of the Old School Tie. So, I will admit I swung out and put on speed past The Meadows, and my boat slid like silk over the still water. A blonde girl in a white frock stood up to watch me and such vanity as I had was conscious of good watermanship.

I sculled upstream for a mile without an easy, and then lay on my sculls and looked at the landscape. I was very fit and did not need a breather, but these shimmery fields and woods and the limpid water persuaded me to sit and stare. Have you ever sat and contemplated the surface of a river, and discovered as you watched it all sorts of complex patterns, of changing lights and shadows, the weaving and waving of water-weeds, the sudden transformation of glass into ruffled silver when a breeze comes along or sometimes for no apparent reason at all. A river's moods are many, it may be sullen and grey or playful and smiling or just a moving mystery, and on this summer morning it had a strange stillness. It did not seem to flow but lay reflecting the sky and the clouds and the shadows of the trees. Almost it might have resented the intrusion of a fellow in a boat who was feeling rather pleased with the way the blades of his sculls took the water.

I turned the boat, and paddled more leisurely homewards. Maybe the river had persuaded me to be more conscious of sobering things than of my muscles. The artist in me dominated the athlete. And then I heard a sudden

hail behind me.

"Look out, sir -- punt ahead."

I reversed, backed water, and turned my head. A punt was close to me in mid-stream, one of the punts from The Meadows. I found myself looking at a sumptuous blonde in a light blue jacket and cerise coloured trousers. A little fat fellow was standing poised with a punt-pole.

"Sorry," said I, "my fault."

The blond smiled upon me. Perhaps she thought me more a figure of a man than her paunchy partner.

I eased my skiff round them.

"Lovely morning, sir," said the fat fellow.

"It is," said I, and sculled on, and the blond turned round and watched me.

Her interest gave me an idea. I stopped sculling and proceeded to back the skiff towards them. The fat little fellow was not much good with a punt-pole, and I soon overhauled them.

I said, "Please excuse me, but are you members of The Meadows' club?"

The little man nodded. It was pretty obvious that he did not want me butting in, but the blond was welcoming.

"We are."

"I'm thinking of joining, but I am told that I have to be vouched for by two members."

The blond dame gave me an arch look.

"I happen to live just down the river. My name's Byron."

"Well -- really -- the -- Mr. Byron? Of course, someone told me of your lovely old house."

She was a saucy creature, and very much come hither.

"We'd feel honoured, wouldn't we, George?"

George was far less welcoming and I more than suspected that my name

conveyed nothing to him.

“ Well, of course -- I’m afraid, sir, I’m rather -- fussy about --
err ---- ”

“ George,” said the lady, “ don’t advertise your ignorance, ” and she beamed upon me -- “ my -- err -- husband -- Mr. Bryon -- never goes to see pictures, and the only thing he reads is the Financial Mirror.

George gave her a sulky look. He was a pompous little person.

“ I’m not so ignorant as you think, my dear -- I -- have heard of Mr. Bryon.”

She giggled.

“ So -- what ! Of course we shall be delighted.”

I nodded and smiled at her, and she tossed her blond curls at me.

“ Thank you, madam.”

“ Our name is Wheatly.”

“ Thank you, Mrs. Wheatly.”

“ Isis, Mr. Bryon, to my friends.”

Her husband became active with the pole. It was obvious that for him, the interlude had lasted long enough. I dipped my sculls and started rowing away. Well, here was a poser for Mr. Horwood. And was the lady veritable Wheatly ? She was certainly ripe corn for the reaper.

II

I made up my mind to tackle Mr. Harold Horwood that very morning, and I changed into a quite decorous lounge suit. I supposed that the club bar would be open by twelve o’clock, and that it was more than probable that I would find the Wheatlys there. A few weekend guests were sitting out on the lawn, reading or gossiping, but they did not pay much attention to me. I strolled into the house, and in the large hall, I found a waiter polishing

tables.

“ Is Mr. Horwood in ? ”

He was a nasty, sallow looking fellow with dead eyes and a flattened nose, and his job seemed more urgent than my question.

“ Maybe.”

He did not ‘ sir ’ me, and I had some experience in dealing with rank underlings. You either bribed them or scared them into courtesy.

“ Just attend to me, will you. I asked you a question.”

“ So -- what ? ”

“ You will take the trouble to answer that question properly.”

He gave his duster a flick.

“ Try the office.”

“ And which -- my lad -- is the office ? ”

“ That door -- there.”

He jerked a thumb at a particular door. It was half open, and I walked towards it and pushed it back and saw the gentleman I was in search of. Almost, he might have been expecting me and had prepared both the tableau and the conversation piece. A premeditated pose this. He was smoking a cigar and lying back in a chair with his feet on his desk, and his blatant blue eyes quizzed me.

“ Good morning, Mr. Byron. You had my letter ? ”

“ I did.”

“ Do you mind my saying that I don’t tolerate insolence to my employees.”

He did not ask me to sit down, but I took another chair and straddled it. This was the kind of welcome I had expected.

“ I treat people as I find them, Mr. Horwood.” I stared hard at his feet. He was wearing brown suede shoes and lavender coloured socks, and they were cocked at me with studied casualness. His cigar smoke drifted towards me. He was the kind of fellow who looked even more grossly

arrogant with his round lips sucking at that brown appendage.

“ Well, Mr. Byron, you had my letter.”

I looked at the smeary streak of black hair that slanted across his low forehead. Assuredly, he was the King of Cads About Town.

“ Have you an application for -- for membership ? ”

“ I don't think that you can have read my letter, Mr. Byron.”

“ I read it, and perhaps more than you intended to convey in it.”

“ You need vouching for -- also, may I say that I don't welcome members who are truculent to my employees.”

I smiled at him.

“ Is it a quality you do not cultivate ? ”

I stared at his feet.

He blew smoke in my direction.

“ I will answer you in your own words, Mr. Byron. I treat people as I find them.”

“ Feet on table -- in fact.”

“ To certain people, yes.”

“ I would like that application form, please, if you have such thing.”

He swung his feet off the desk and sat up.

“ And who, Mr. Byron, is going to sponsor you ? ”

“ I think that is my business.”

He looked hard at me.

“ One moment, sir. May I say we do not encourage tough members, or those who -- want to get over-stimulated. It is a nuisance to have to throw such people out.”

He hunched his heavy shoulders, and I smiled at him,.

“ And who is your chucker-out, Mr. Horwood ? ”

“ I am -- as a matter of fact.”

I looked him over. He was a powerful brute, but fat and flabby.

"I see -- Well, I am still waiting for the form."

And suddenly he leaned forward, pulled a sheet of paper out of a tray, and tossed it to me.

"You can fill it in, Mr. Byron, and leave it with me."

I reached for it and rose.

"Quite so, when I have obtained my signatures."

I got up, smiled at him, and left him there, looking rather like a balked and angry bull behind a gate.

The flat nosed waiter was still polishing tables, or pretending to do so, and I was pretty sure that he had been listening to the conversation. I had some silvers in a trouser pocket, and more out of mischievous egotism than from any feeling of goodwill, I passed him ten bob or so.

"Whereabouts is the bar?"

The barometer went up with a bang, and he became obsequious.

"Thank you, sir; this way sir."

The door of the club bar was open, and I could see people sitting on high stools and round black topped tables. It was a flashy, garish sort of room whose Victorians had put on a blue and yellow trousseau. The shelves of the bar were a brilliant yellow and the counter top and rail was of platinum plated metal. The ceiling and walls a royal-blue. Bad tint -- that -- for complexions.

I saw Isolda Mallory behind the bar, dressed in black, and in the act of pouring gin into two glasses. As matter of fact they were the Wheatly glasses, and my sponsors were on the spot.

I walked into the bar. For the moment, Isolda did not see me; she was adding vermouth to the gin, but my blond lady saw and welcomed me, and turned on her stool.

"Come in, Mr. Byron. Here we are all merry and bright."

Did her hand quake for a second? Anyhow, she managed to overfill one

glass, and had to wipe it.

“ Sorry, sir.”

“ All the more for me, my dear.”

She did not look at me, but I got the impression that to her I was very much present.

There happened to be a vacant stool next to Mrs. Wheatly and she patted it.

“ Do come and perch, Mr. Byron. And you have the membership form. Splendid.”

I found myself between her and a chinless young man with a corn-coloured cavalry moustache. Mr. Wheatly bobbed at me behind his wife.

“ What will you have, sir ? ”

“ Oh, a gin and lime, and thanks very much.”

I placed the piece of paper on the counter and watched Miss Mallory without making it obvious.

“ Gin and lime for Mr. Byron, my dear.”

Did he “ My Dear ” all and sundry ?

Isolda took a glass from a shelf and held it under a gin bottle that was suspended upside down by one of those metal holders whose actual utility has always puzzled me. Her movements appeared easy and deliberate but my impression was that she was making them so. She might have been a perfect mechanism serving her world with efficiency, but utterly without emotion. Her very dignity was defensive, and I could understand that defence was needed.

She set the glass down before me, but her eyes did not lift to my face. I said “ Thank you,” and she turned away towards the chinless young man beside me. He was holding up a finger.

“ A repeat for me, Issy -- darling.”

Issy -- darling -- indeed ! I gave him a homicidal glare, but his silly

little profile remained just profile to me.

I had to remember my sponsors, and particularly so the lady. She was arch and forthcoming. I had to make the best of it.

“ Oh ! Mr. Byron -- I did so love your portrait of Lady Mainswaring at the Academy.”

I raised my glass to her.

“ Thank you. Some subjects are easy.”

“ Oh -- how ? ”

“ When the sitter is so paintable.”

She glad-eyed me. Gads, was she going to suggest that I should paint her portrait ?

“ Should I be -- easy ? ”

“ Definitely.”

She giggled and picked up the membership form.

“ You haven't signed it yet.”

“ I'm afraid I haven't a pen.”

“ George, your pen.”

He produced one, and I signed my name, and Mrs. Wheatly and George added theirs.

“ There -- Mr. Byron.”

“ I am very grateful to you both.”

I raised my glass again to them. Isolda had moved to the other end of the bar, and was talking to a gay old fellow with a fuzz like Benjamin Disraeli. She was utterly and ruthlessly profile to me. Her shrivelled beau was smiling at her, with a glistening galaxy of fake teeth and God -- what was she doing here ? Had my first impression been silly and sentimental and I the fool of a lovely surface ? She stood straight and still, looking past Mr. Benjamin at the meadows while she listened to his chatter. He lisped. He gave one the impression of much wealth and he wore

a diamond ring.

But I had the Wheatlys to propitiate and I sipped my drink and made conversation. It was pretty obvious to me that the lady was playing up for an invitation to Hurtfield, and I could suspect that George was not a gentleman who possessed much glamour.

“ And are you painting a picture now, Mr. Byron ? ”

“ Well, yes, and having trouble with it.”

“ Now -- isn't that interesting and surprising.”

I laughed.

“ It can be damned exasperating.”

“ You know -- I am a very sympathetic person, aren't I, George ? ”

He grunted, and I thought it time to glance at my watch.

“ Sunday dinner. I shall get into terrible trouble if I am late. Cooks can't be offended.”

I got off my stool.

“ Thank you for all your kindness. Till next time.”

Isolda was still gazing over the top of Disraeli's baldish head. I had no glance from her. I walked out of the bar, and across the lounge to Horwood's office. He was sitting there, sucking his cigar.

I laid the membership form on the table, took out my wallet and extracted a pound note, and groped for a shilling.

“ I'm afraid I've no silver.”

Horwood glared at the piece of paper and then grinned at me.

“ Never mind the bob, Bob.”

I felt a great desire to smack his large and looming face.

Isolda's Diary

I found myself wondering tonight whether I have any vanity left in me. I have -- of a sort, or is it fastidiousness or a kind of petulant pride? Do I care a damn what a man thinks of me? Do I care of what I think of myself? Much more so. My mirror is for me -- not for man. Yes, and for Rita.

I can feel a maiden, motherly blush when I remember her saying, "Isn't mother lovely?"

Am I? Yet in a vague sort of way I am realizing that no woman is lovely unless she feels lovely inside.

Strange, how wenches can behave and feel like trash. Just instinct that wallows. Easily come by, easily shed. And I'm not cold or an ice maiden. Maybe I have had my lesson, and something in me went into the refrigerator afterwards -- and is still there.

When some men look at you, you feel tarnished. And I'm afraid H.H. is one of them.

Persistent fellow -- Mr. Robert Byron.

So -- he has joined the Club, sponsored by the Wheatly woman.

Is she the lure?

Somehow I don't think so. Besides -- who would want to compete with George? Or ride an ass that had been ridden by George.

Isolda, you are being vulgar.

I am a little puzzled by Robert Byron. He doesn't look at you as though you were a basket of peaches to be bought -- at a price. He has manners, and dignity, and -- a sense of humour. Also, he looks fit and strong, and not like most of these flabby fools.

Yes, I wonder why he joined the Club. He does not belong here.

Monday brought more rain, steady windblown rain that which can be so much a part of this green island, and yet not always dew from Heaven. I could picture poor John Strange looking at his drenched hay crop, bored faces at the windows of The Meadows, faces that waited for the bar to open. I had an early outing on the river and the water was lustreless and dead, the willows wet and sad. Thomas Hardy weather. My wet vest was sticking to me when I housed the boat, and went in to change.

What about some work ? I did not feel in the mood for it, but ones creative moods can be incalculable, and some urge be waiting for you like an inopportune creditor. I lit a pipe and strolled across to the studio, and was confronted by that baffling and unfinished picture. I squatted on a stool and stared at it, and its smudge of a face mocked me. Was my inability to complete the thing symptomatic of something else ? Was I groping for an inspiration that would not take shape because the mental and emotional images within me were incompatible ?

Then, I was stung by a challenge, an impulse that I could not analyse. Something seemed to dare me to paint Her, not as a drowned girl floating in green and black water, but as she had stood in stark reality behind the platinum plated bar.

More than one novelist has told me that you cannot write as you please. Pen and paper are there, and the creator sitting at his desk, but some mysterious entity seems to take charge, and that which manifests may be utterly unsuspected by the author. I remember William Sykins telling me that he had began a book in which a particular old lady had appeared as a minor character, but as the tale progressed she persisted in taking charge and became the leading lady in it. Such was my mood that morning. I removed Ophelia from the easel, and put a clean canvas in her place, and

got my gear ready, and prepared to be the clear-headed and impartial craftsman. I suppose that she would manifest as a comely young woman in black, but not a bit of it. I am a quick work when the mood is in me, and the thing grew amazingly under my hand, and it began to astonish me, for some other self appeared to be interpreting her in a strangely vivid way. It was Isolda Mallory and yet not Isolda Mallory as my sensuous self might have seen her. Her face had a curious, limpid sheen as though her essential and secret self was manifest through me and to me. I was fascinated and absorbed.

I was unconscious of time or of physical things. I did not hear Bill open the studio door.

“Excuse me, sir, it’s one o’clock.”

After lunch, I returned to the studio, lit a pipe, and sat down on the sofa to contemplate my work. A portraiture by memory might not have satisfied me, but as I contemplated it, I realised that it was more than an attempt to put a pretty woman on canvas. It might be in the rough, but it had a quality that was not of the flesh. Temperament in woman had always piqued me, and part of my art had been to express it, but this was more than temperament. Some other Isolda Mallory might have posed for me, still head up and aloof, but gentler and mysteriously brilliant, and more mature, *Dia Mater* and not the wild eyed maid of the woods. Yes, no tough young woman this -- behind a bar dispensing drinks, and being defensively bright to the lustful male, but a creature whose serene inward and secret spiritual glow illuminated.

I sat and stared at her as I had painted her. I have used the word illuminated, and it seemed to me that illumination in the shape of sensitive insight might have come to me. So had the Italian’s conceived and presented their Madonnas, and my memories went back to Rome and Florence, the Mother of God and the Mother of Man.

I think my pipe went out. I was in one of those curious and visionary moods which descend upon those who seek to interpret life. In the older parlance, I was fey. Yet, there was a part of me that was modernist and sardonic. Did I really believe in a spirit world ? Was I fool enough to translate a night-club hostess into a dream from Dante ? Sentimental idiot ! But it was the shallow, modernist, know-all sceptic in me which was silenced. Like a child I could pose a complacent cleric with some unanswerable question.

“ Why are the stars there ? ”

I relit my pipe and felt childlike in the presence of something that was more than an illusion. Isolda Mallory had manifested to me in the shape of a young Madonna. Yes, why were the stars there ?

Answer me that -- you cock-a-doodle man !

II

I painted in a background very much in the Italian manner, a castle on a high peaked hill, dim blue distances, far mountains. It pleased me, and I had not noticed that the rain had ceased, or a wet sun was shining. My Madonna was looking down as at a young child lying in her lap, and her face had infinite tenderness.

Then the door opened and I saw Betty.

“ A lady has called, sir.”

I nearly dropped my brush.

“ What name ? ”

“ She didn't give a name, sir. She said you would know her. She is from The Meadows.”

“ Fair or dark, Betty ? ”

She crinkled up her little nose at me -- Betty was one of my defences.

"A blond, sir. She's in the parlour."

"I'll come along."

I waited until Betty had gone. Who was I to see? Her? I hung a white cloth over the picture.

III

Mrs. Wheatly! I found her posed in a high backed Jacobean chair, and smelling a red rose which she had collected from somewhere. She was in her blue trousers and cerise coloured coat, and her blue eyes played at innocence. She might have been the mature and modern flapper. Damn it, I had imagined her back in town with George.

"Oh, Mr. Byron, -- do forgive me. I felt I must come and see your wonderful old home."

I could have replied, "Say you."

I offered her a cigarette, and she picked at it with carmine tinted talons, and her eyes were coy. I could not help smiling at myself and at her. I had dreamed of St. Cecilia, here I was confronted with a Belgravian grifter.

I made bright conversation. I gave her some of Hurtfield's history, and she sat with her blue legs crossed and played the fascinated and fascinating flapper. And how was I to get rid of the lady, and would she go back and boast that she had gate-crashed me, and that everything was marvellous? I was sorry George was not here to reduce the situation to bored bathos. Then, with an air of some enthusiastic innocent asking Winston Churchill for his autograph, she said that she would simply love to see where I worked.

I had had some experience of such situations, one or two of them dutifully embarrassing, and I thought that if I got her out of the house

and showed her the studio she would have no further excuse for lingering. She was wearing sandal-shoes, the big toenails carmined like her fingernails and we should have to cross the wet grass. I told her so, and she replied that she simply loved paddling! So, off we went to the studio.

She threw a pose in the doorway.

"Now, isn't it wonderful, my being where you paint those marvellous pictures."

And then, before I had tumbled as to what might happen, she had spotted the canvas on the easel, covered with a cloth.

She said, "Oh, your latest. I just must have a peep at it."

Before I could think up an answer she had pattered over to the easel and lifted the cloth. In fact, it came away in her hand. She stood staring. I got the impression that she was not pleased.

"Why -- it's just like Miss Mallory!"

I was damning her.

"Well -- a study -- of a type -- from memory."

"Hasn't she sat for you?"

"She has not."

I suspected that she did not believe me.

But her enthusiasm was far less florid, and the vivacious flapper became the sourish blonde. The condescension of such creatures is less than childish. Had she expected to find a study of Isis Wheatley under that white cover? Perhaps. The vanity of some women is perplexing. Meanwhile, I was realizing that she would go back to The Meadows and begin blabbing about the business. She might play at darts with Isolda, and with suggestive giggles, indulge in innuendos, and simper with feline malice. And if with diplomatic politeness I suggested that she too might be an interesting sitter, she would go back and plant two darts instead of one. She might describe me as a womanist, a fascinating play-boy who had

to be treated with caution. Lastly, Mr. Harold Horwood might hear of it, and I had my own ideas about Horwood.

So I lied to her. I said that I was expecting an important telephone call, and would she mind if I went back to the house and waited for it. She gave me a glass-eyed look. Maybe she had heard that one before.

"I'm sure I mustn't -- interfere -- with your call, Mr. Byron."

I accompanied her to the iron gates and watched her blue legs carry her back to The Meadows.

IV

The sun shown in at my window and got me out of bed half an hour earlier than usual. It was six o'clock and though the morning had a brilliant serenity I was feeling restless. I put on my boating togs and went down and out to the boathouse and saw the skiff clear. I remembered that the slide needed greasing, but I did not bother, and just slipped the sculls on the swivels and pushed out. There was something in me that asked for fierce action and my swinging was jerky and the rhythm brittle. The sliding seat squawked at me as though emphasising my vague sense of frustration.

Suddenly I heard a voice.

"Look ahead, please."

I made the boat swerve and glanced over my shoulder.

A punt lay five yards away and in it was Isolda Mallory.

She was sitting on a cushion, the paddle resting on the gunwales. Was this her one peaceful hour in the day and had I wrecked it? I turned the skiff so that I faced her and lay on my sculls.

"Sorry. I'm afraid I took the river for granted."

"Men do ---- "

That piqued me, and the way she looked past me at the water and the willows.

"In all cases and on all occasions ? I might explain that until your place started business -- there was peace here."

Her retort was instant.

"It is not my place."

Now, I had been the recipient of a succession of snubs and I felt like countering them, but when I remembered the way she had manifested on canvas, I let the protest pass.

"I did not think it so, Miss Mallory. That was a slip of the tongue."

She was silent, and we were drifting close to each other. I was aware of her looking me over as though I was a curious sample of the creature -- man.

"Is this a habit of yours ?"

"What -- exactly ----"

"Oh, being so busy so early ?"

Again I felt nettled.

"Well, yes, the keeping fit idea. The river in summer, and a cross-country trot in winter. And I box and fence a bit. A craftsman has to keep fit."

We had drifted down to Hurtfield and I saw her look at the old house and her face seemed to soften. The house had the rising sun behind it, and cedars and the high chimneys cast long shadows, and there was a wet glow upon the flowers and grass. We and the river were in the sunlight and the house seemed to watch us as it had watched three hundred years or more go by.

I glanced at her and saw smile.

But a sudden little cloud swam across the river and I saw that evanescent smile vanish. We were drifting slowly past the house, and came opposite

the boathouse and my studio and it occurred to me to wonder whether Mrs. Wheatly had blabbed about that picture.

I said -- "That old house is full of ghosts. It had its tragedies -- but some houses -- like some people -- manage to stay wholesome."

She seemed to consider those words.

"Perhaps -- because it is old -- Do you think it is easy for the young to be serene -- yes, in these days?"

I looked hard at her, but she did not look at me.

"No -- We have lost all the mystery that might have been."

She gave a mirthless little laugh.

"Mystery! Yes, perhaps for the safe and successful few."

Had I been completely the hard-boiled hedonist I might have found her bitterness provoking and attractive. How very pleasant to smother it in hot embraces, and kiss the sourness from her lips, but somehow I did not feel that way about her. Soppy, romantic fellow! I began to suspect that the Palace of Pleasure over yonder was no place of peace for her, but a house of stark necessity. Money, and money for what? Herself -- hardly so. I could not see her as one of those embittered beauties who would sell that quality to suborning, elderly cads. Yes, just what had been her background, and what was the thing she had suffered.

I said -- very gently -- "I have been lucky. Some people are born to a craft. It is there or not there. One should not feel boastful about it."

She seemed to be watching the play of light on the water. Why couldn't she be frank with me? Was she too prejudiced against the creature -- man?

"May I ask you a question?"

She gave me an almost frightened glance.

"I don't welcome questions."

"No? Not even when ----?"

And suddenly she dipped her paddle and began to turn the punt, and I just

lay on my sculls and watched her.

I said -- "I can be a little sarcastic about things. Did anyone tell you that I had painted something from memory?"

Her paddle still stirred the water, and she had become profile to me.

"I do not answer questions."

"Well, then -- forgive me for asking them."

I let her go for I had more than a feeling that she might be grateful for generous restraint. No questions welcomed! Was not the significance obvious? She had some unhappy happenings to hide. And was she so cynical about life that a decadent cads-shop like The Meadows was just business to her? She just didn't care. That might be the philosophy of this age of dope and decadence when you could buy a girl for a bottle of gin or a hundred gaspers.

And yet? I got going again, but I sculled downstream and round a bend and so lost sight of her, but the question she had posed me with took shape. Would a woman who was bitterly disillusioned choose to leave her bed at six in the morning and to find beauty and solitude upon the river? Hardly so. And I had trespassed upon her one hour of self-escape.

I was up again early next morning, but no punt came down stream. Was it that she wished for no contacts with me and had surrendered her idle hour? So, next day, I left my skiff in the boathouse and took a run across John Strange's meadow. Yes, her punt had gone upstream. I saw it laying moored under a weeping willow.

Isolda's Diary

The Wheatly woman has been gabbing to me about his marvellous old house.

"Such atmosphere, my dear!"

Atmosphere! And how did she get in there? Somehow I suspect her of hiding malice in her Georgian bosom.

I had an urge to escape for an hour or so from The Meadows misery. I got up at six when no one else was alive and took out one of the punts. The early sunlight and dewy grass, sleek water and the willows. I let the punt drift down stream and it was sliding under the bridge which carries the road when I saw -- him. He was in his out-rigged skiff and sculling straight for me as though the whole river was his.

I had to shout or we should have collided and he stopped his boat, looked over a shoulder and saw me.

No escape for me. I tried to be facetious, but it seemed shallow stuff and he had me in deep water. I said something silly about being up in the morning early and he said it was the idea of keeping fit.

He looked it, sleek and sinewy and strong. He said a craftsman had to keep fit, and that physical fitness was like spiritual fastidiousness.

Fastidiousness. Was he talking for effect? No, I don't think so.

We had drifted downstream and were opposite the old house. This was the first time I had seen it and it had a most curious effect on me. Gracious and lovely, it made me feel trashy and cheap, like some post-war prefab dumped down beside a house of beauty. I caught him looking at me in a queer, smiling way, as though he had divined how I was feeling. He began to tell me about the house, and I realized that he loved it and its beauty.

A house full of memories, ghosts, human happenings. It had known joy and sorrow, Queens and lovely women. Its name had the tang of tragedy, and yet -- he said it was a serene and reassuring house and full of a feeling of

mystery. I could believe it. He said it was so apart from the modern scuffle and gobble and humbug, and that it gave him the peace his work asked for.

He was talking to me as to one who could understand and these intimate words of his made one feel strangely moved to like him. Then he said something about painting a portrait from memory and I -- the tough cynic -- found myself slipping into absurd shyness, yes just like some romantic girl in a panic, and about what ? The water and the willows and that glorious old house and a man who seemed somewhat different from other men.

How ridiculous ! I was suddenly scared of the emotion in me. I said I had to get back to the day's work.

He smiled and let me go. There was a kind of restrained strength about him.

Isolda -- you fool -- are you getting sentimental ?

- 9 -

I am a big fellow and I have heard it said that big men are much less vain than the little ones who have to strut and swagger to make up for an undersized body, but I don't think the generalization holds good. I have known one or two over-sized fellows whose self-conceit was prodigious and I was to include Major Harold Horwood among them. But my own male-conceit, such as it was, had been chastened by Isolda Mallory. I think I have said earlier that women have been kind to me, and even in such adventures, success can make a man less bumptious than one who has chased petticoats and failed to capture them. And here was a young woman who could keep me at a distance, and I was piqued by it, and it was more than pique. The painting of some portraits may be easy and others exasperating and never had I attempted to express so baffling a live portrait as her.

Was I falling in love with a young woman who snubbed me ?

I can laugh now over my own almost boyish innocence.

And was she Horwood's mistress ?

My emotional reaction to that possibility should have warned me how damnably serious the brain could be.

I simply would not believe it.

II

I decided that it was about time I paid the club another visit and as Saturday was their gala night I chose the following Saturday. It was to be a more hectic affair than I had foreseen, and quite early in the evening, cars began to crash in. I had not bothered to put on a dinner jacket, and I crossed the road in a lounge suit to find P.C. Gates standing by the hedge. Already cars were parked beside the road, and yet more were arriving and

their occupants were very much dressed.

"Looks like a merry evening, Tom."

He grinned at me.

"Are you a member, sir?"

"Yes -- for the purpose of -- observation. Any complaints?"

"I have orders to watch some of these cars, sir."

"I'm not surprised -- By the way, if I notice anything interesting, I'll pass it to you."

"Thank you, sir."

Cars to the right of one, cars to the left of one, and I had to take to the grass. Drinks were being served at the garden tables, and there was plenty of colour and gabble. It struck me as being either a very silly or a nasty crowd -- a gin and giggles show. And then I ran slap into Horwood. He looked more swollen and greasy than usual.

"Evening, Mr. Byron, I'm afraid D.J.s are our rule."

"Even for a drink and dinner?"

"All our tables are reserved. We are having two separate dinners."

"Congratulations -- well, I'll conform."

I had a feeling that he was watching me like a savage and suspicious bull, and that he might have unpleasant reasons of his own for his greasily polite hostility. Was I too near a neighbour, or had Mrs. Wheatley been bleating about the picture she had uncovered in my studio? Meanwhile a large black Rolls came rolling up to the house, and Horwood became the welcoming urbane host. He saluted the car and its occupants and went to open the door to a very sparkling and swarthy lady and a fat man with a pork-pie face -- obviously potent and profitable patrons. I had a good look at Horwood as he bowed over Madam's hand. He had curiously red and swollen cheeks, like a lout with a couple of sweets at suck. The streak of black hair might have been gummed to his low forehead,

his big bun-shaped head seemed to sit almost neckless on his massive shoulders. Yes, a powerful beast, but far too fat. He might last for two minutes in a punching match, but one good right to the chin or the solar plexus might put him down and out.

He was arming the bejewelled lady to the porch, and even his voice was inducing and suborning. The fat man waddled after them and I gathered that he was much less important than Madame. Much money here -- most certainly. I watched them disappear into the house, and at that moment the Saturday dance-band came to life in the lounge.

The Lambeth Walk ! How appropriate !

I went back and changed and Betty managed to scrounge a cold snack for me. I told Bill that I would take the key, and that they need not sit up for me, for I could tell by Bill's face that his old war wound was hurting him. A shell splinter had gashed his spine.

"Thank you, sir."

It is good to be able to trust some people, and to feel good with them, and I looked on Bill and Betty as valued friends. They were loyal and did not exploit me, and I think that Hurtfield was a happy home for them.

I put a pipe and a tobacco pouch in my pockets, though I imagined that The Meadows was far too much a Cads Show to tolerate pipes like that pretentious club in Pall Mall where fat Jews may suck cigars, but a good English pipe is forbidden. I strolled across into a medley of jazz and gabble and gin and giggles. They were dancing in the lounge, and when I walked into the bar, I found two or three couples dancing there. Isolda Mallory was behind the bar, dressed in an austere kind of black frock buttoned up to her throat like a fencing tunic. All the stools appeared to be occupied, but I found a vacant perch at the end of the bar.

My neighbour happened to be the chinless young one with the blond cavalry moustache who had been here the previous Saturday. Even at this

early stage of the evening he had too much to drink and he was clinking an empty glass against the rail of the bar. I don't think Isolda had seen me, for she was being kept busy, and she appeared to be in no hurry to attend to this little ass.

"Hi, Izzy, darling ---- "

She glanced in our direction and saw me. Was I fancying this or did I appear to be some sort of antidote to gin and giggles ? She came towards us.

"Good evening Mr. Byron."

She ignored the young man and his tinkling glass and he turned and glared at me.

"May I have a gin and lime ? "

The young gentleman protested. He was one of those idiots who grew quarrelsome when in drink.

"Here, hold on -- you're butting in."

I smiled at him.

"It's my first -- my lad."

He took that as an insult.

"Meaning ---- ? "

Isolda ignored him and turned away to mix my drink and the little idiot poked his silly face at me.

"I asked you a question."

"Yes, I think you did."

"So what ? "

Isolda came to face me with a glass in her hand. She did not look at my neighbour. She placed the glass in front of me, and as she did so, I saw the lad's hand jerk towards it. He knocked it over and the glass rolled off the counter and crashed on the floor.

My right hand shot out and I gripped his wrist. I looked him in the face

and smiled.

“ Don’t be an ass.”

I dug my fingernails into his wrist. I was hurting him and I meant to hurt him. He winced and tried to twist away, but I held him hard and fast and I kept on smiling.

“ Sorry, Miss Mallory. May I have another ? Perhaps my next door neighbour will join me.”

I smiled at him. I had him cowed and tamed. He gave a sickly sort of grin and surrendered.

“ No, my show, sir. Damned clumsy of me.”

I released his wrist and patted him on the shoulder.

Isolda had her back to me, mixing drinks and when she turned to face us -- all was peace. Alcoholic reactions are swift and surprisingly silly, and my neighbour was looking at me as at some admired big brother.

Isolda placed the glasses before us, and I pulled out my wallet.

“ How much, Miss Mallory ? ”

“ Ten shillings, Mr. Byron.”

But my sudden new friend protested.

“ No, sir, mine please. I owe for three ---- ”

She was looking at him with tolerant amusement.

“ And -- a glass, Mr. Maltby.”

“ Yes, of course, the glass. Damned clumsy of me.”

I allowed the poor little twerp to pay and I had managed to calm a storm in a teacup without a public shindig. There was so much noise and our neighbours were so absorbed in each other that the affair had passed almost unnoticed.

I raised my glass to Mr. Maltby.

“ Happy days.”

He raised his and giggled at me.

“ Good old sport, sir.”

I could have questioned the old. At thirty seven I was fitter than most men who were my junior by ten years. I turned and raised my glass to Isolda. Our eyes met, and for the first time I discovered in them something that was unremote and friendly.

III

The Bar Parade began to break up. A little, sophisticated brunette came and collected young Maltby, though whether he was capable of dancing was quite another matter. The band in the lounge was playing hot jazz. Isolda was standing opposite me.

I said “ Did you give him iced water ? ”

Her smile was sudden yet secret.

“ With just three drops of gin. Thank you for doing what you did.”

I twiddled my empty glass and she put out a hand, but I shook my head at her.

“ No repeats, and thank you.”

She took the glass and put it aside.

“ Would it spoil your style ? ”

She was leaning on the bar and I realised that she might have been standing there for hours. I picked up one of the high stools, and passed it over.

“ Why not sit ? ”

I saw her lashes quiver.

“ Thank you.”

We were facing each other now, and I longed to ask her a particular question, but did not dare to ask it. I wanted to say -- “ Why are you here ? This is not your world, any more than it is mine.”

She reached for something under the counter and producing a cigarette case, offered it to me. I smiled and shook my head.

"Afraid I'm a pipe person. You smoke."

She opened the case, and I struck a match for her and the little flame seemed to light up her eyes.

"Thank you. You handled that silly child so kindly."

"Not -- quite -- so kindly."

"Oh."

"Nail pressure on a flabby wrist -- I remember ---- "

I paused.

"Tell me."

"Oh, one of those war incidents. A little subordinate of mine on D Day -- got -- hysteria."

She was silent for a moment, and her face was frowning.

"So -- you were in the war."

"Of course."

"And what did you do to the lad ? "

"Smacked his face good and hard. It bought him round all right. He was a good lad."

She put out a hand and dropped the ash from her cigarette into an ash-tray.

"So -- you believe in rough discipline ? "

"That depends on the person -- but first ---- "

"Yes ? "

"No, I was going to be priggish."

She gave me a quick look.

"Should I translate. Self discipline -- first."

I nodded at her.

"True -- Oh Queen "

Her face had lost its frown and had softened to me. We were alone now in the bar, and I realised that the dance band was playing a waltz -- a thing from "Bitter Sweet."

I stood up and looked at her.

"Will you dance with me?"

She hesitated.

"I'm on duty."

"Please -- I ask it quite humbly."

She rose, stubbed out her cigarette end and moved towards a flap in the bar counter. I raised it and held it up for her.

We danced.

Never had I danced with anyone who could move as she did. It was music in movement and it thrilled me. We did not speak. I think we were both lost in the exquisite rhythm of that waltz when I heard his voice.

"Excuse me, Mr. Byron, my bar-maid does not dance with -- visitors."

Bar-maid! How near I was to smacking him in the face!

But I held myself in, both because I had felt her go rigid, and because a row might be far more sinister for her than for me. She had dropped my hand and drawn away. I made myself smile at Horwood. The cunning of courtesy might be more subtle than open warfare.

"Sorry, Mr. Horwood -- I was the offender."

Isolda had gone back behind the bar, and was collecting glasses and her hands were deliberate, yet they seemed to be moving to some music.

Horwood stood there waiting and watching me, and I got the impression that he thought I was scared of him. Well, let him think it.

I felt for my pipe and produced it.

"Is -- this -- allowed?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Byron."

I laughed.

"I seem to be very much out of order tonight."

He was both urbane and truculent.

"We set a certain standard here, Mr. Byron."

"I quite understand -- and you are responsible."

"I am."

I repocketed my pipe.

"Is it allowed in the garden?"

"Yes, you may smoke your pipe in the garden, Mr. Byron."

"Thank you, Mr. Horwood."

I think he supposed that he had suppressed me, but he still stood there, arrogantly sure of himself. And then a band of people drifted in and up to the bar and Isolda turned to welcome them. I walked out past Horwood into the lounge and out into the garden, and filled and lit my pipe.

What a mixed bag of emotions a man can contain in him, as I strolled down to the river over the soft dark grass. I knew that I was in love and that I hated, and that there was laughter in me. I -- the somewhat celebrated Robert Byron had fallen for a chestnut haired bar-maid! Damn him for using that word! And had he assumed that I was a cissy to be brow-beaten and pushed about as he pleased? Oh, delicious irony! Part of me was still waltzing with her. Bitter Sweet. Yes, she was that very creature in that world of music and he the turgid, scorned bully. But if it came to fists ----? A mischievous devil exulted in me.

I went and stood by the river and the night was a Midsummer's Dream. Ye gods -- I -- the craftsman had fallen for a creature in whom God's craft had manifested so supremely -- Yes and with tenderness and that strange reverence which casts an almost mystic glow over sacred love. Dear, romantic fool and Bitter Sweet! Assuredly, that was the name for her. Nor was I so sweet. I would play the beast's game for him until I had him in the predestined corner -- and then ----

I wondered back into the house and strolled here and there observing and listening. People were dancing -- one or two couples were cuddling close round tables ; Isolda had a whisky brotherhood at the bar. But I missed certain people, the bejewelled dame and her pork-pie faced escort, young Maltby and Horwood himself. Their absence intrigued me.

I looked for the place where a little wagering might be in process and found a door in a darkish passage. I tried it and found it locked but there were voices on the other side of the door and they were not staff voices. I withdrew rather rapidly. I wandered into the bar and Isolda smiled at me and a lean coot-headed fellow whose black hair seemed to be slipping off his head, turned and eyed me with hostility. Competition was not welcomed. I strolled out into the garden and round the house to a part which might contain the room with a locked door, and I came upon two heavily curtained windows. I stood and listened to muffled voices.

Ha, ha, the card room ! And what kind of game was played in there ? Honest Bridge or Poker, or did a little ball circulate ? I filled and lit another pipe and wandered off across the grass. I realised that stars were shining. I came opposite the windows of the bar and one of them was a French window and open. A big yew tree stood near, and I moved into its deep shadow and leaned against the trunk.

There might have been premonition in my caution. I saw a figure emerge. Isolda. And then another figure, the lobster legs and black bulk of Harold Horwood.

He said, " You will go back -- at once, Bella."

Her voice was threatening.

" My name is not Bella."

" It is to me, my dear."

" I'm -- tired -- tonight of being an exhibit for cads."

" This is a cads show my dear and run for profit. You may play the bloody

ice-maiden, but I pay you to humour the fools, especially the old ones."

I could see them by the light from the long window, but to them I was part of the shadow of the yew. I covered the bowl of my pipe with one hand and stood stock still. There was a short silence between them. She was head up, tense and in the half light her face looked blanched, and there was no lustre in her hair.

She said, "Have you no pity?"

All she got from him was a suborning laugh and a cynical retort.

"Plenty, if you choose to use it. I'm something of a creditor, my dear."

Creditor? Had he some hold over her? And him My Dearing of her was making me feel savage. I watched her and saw a hand go to her forehead.

"You were rather different -- when I -- accepted ---- "

"No need to play the sweet innocent -- Captain Carter was an ingenious rascal. You'll admit that."

"Oh, for God's sake -- shut up."

"A charmer and so parisienne. Vienna nights and all that. I could have warned you."

"Oh, yes, you could have warned me."

"Useful information, my dear. An officer's widow -- what, with no pension, and plenty of glamour. Some widow!"

I saw her move suddenly towards the window, and his arm went out.

"No, don't touch me."

She swept past him, and I had a clenched fist ready. If he tried to man-handle her -- I knew that I ----

But he let her pass. She was going back to what might be to her a kind of pillory, and to the confronting of all those silly faces. I waited and watched him. So this large cad had some hold over her. I felt like taking him by the throat and choking the truth out of him.

He followed her through the window, and I held back under the shadow of the tree.

Isolda's Diary

What a night ! What can I make of it ?

First he helped me with the drunken little ass.

Then -- I danced with him. And what a partner !

Lastly -- Horwood. He was pretty insolent to Robert Byron and he accepted it, played down, and was suave.

Why ? To put me on countenance and prevent a row ? Almost I could have wished him to have smashed that arrogant fat face.

Is Mr. Robert Byron just coloured cardboard, all clean and no guts when a rough-house threatens ?

He handled the little fellow so much, but backed down to the big one.

Oh, primitive woman !

I am beginning to be afraid of the great greasy beast. Hatred and fear go together. That last clash with him sent me upstairs cold and shivering ! What a fool I was to be candid with the cad. And yet he was in Vienna and knew ----

I suppose he thinks that he can scare me into surrender. How utterly nauseating !

No wonder I lock my door.

- 10 -

Housekeeper, part time hostess and barmaid, such were her duties over yonder. How did I find out the details ? Well, never mind, but find them out I did.

And who was the mysterious Captain Carter ? The human wreckage of the War was still adrift all over Europe, and I was one of the few who did not dwell upon an Island of Unrest.

Unrest ? Yes, but it possessed me during the next few days, and I will admit that I was yea or nay to myself, and somehow strangely shy of immediate contacts. If she had some secret of her own and suffered for it and from it, did I dare to play the Lotharius and the romantic and forthright male ? I think now that I was wiser than I knew in holding back and waiting. She might regard all men as tainted and I had a feeling that if there was to be any signal it should come from her.

Meanwhile the weather was set fair, and poor John Strange was struggling to get in a tangled hay crop. He was short of labour, for two men had walked out on him, as men will when their little selves have come to assume that they are more important than the master. It seemed to me that helping with that crop was a good job for any man who had guts. I went across the bridge and climbed over the field gate to his north field. I volunteered and a tired and worried neighbour blessed me.

We set to work on a field by the river. Much of the crop was laid and had to be cut by hand, and I will confess that I am no good with a scythe, but I could wield a sickle, rake and pitchfork. Strange assigned me the flattened grasses nearest to the river, for on the higher ground the reaper could tackle the crop that had been less messed up by gales and rain.

I was in brown shorts and singlet, and over yonder stood The Meadows, with its garden tables and umbrellas like giant sunflowers in full bloom.

A few of its patrons appeared to remain during the week, and they came and sat there and smoked and read books and papers. I saw Horwood strolling about among them on occasions, and playing the urbane host, but only once did I see Isolda. It was on a Thursday afternoon, and she was deputizing for one of the staff, and carrying tea trays out into the garden. There were no children over yonder, and the great bald white house suggested a sterile spinster.

The hay was drying well in the sunny weather, and the fragrance of it was the smell of high summer, and gradually the swathes lost their greenness. We turned and tossed them all, and I was feeling good, and ready for much beer, poor stuff though it might be. I had blistered a hand with so much sickle-work and had to strap it, and for the time being my jaunts on the river were curtailed. An occasional punt put out from The Meadows and paddled or poled lazily past the willows.

I was working close down to the water one morning when I heard a voice hailing me, as it boomed irony.

“ Turned farmer, Mr. Byron ? ”

It was Horwood. He stood with his feet wide apart, his lobster legs straddling, and he had a way of waggling his hips as he stood. I leaned upon my pitchfork and gazed at him. His white shirt was open at the throat, and his baggy grey trousers bulged over his belly.

“ Good for the reduction of fat,” said I.

I could see the smirk on his florid face.

“ Reductio-ad-absurdum, what ! ”

Facetious fellow !

“ Why not try it,” said I. “ Tightening of belts is in the fashion and veritable Cripps.”

He swayed to and fro on his massive legs.

“ Austerity doesn't interest me, Mr. Byron.”

"Quite so," I said, and went on with my work.

Austerity -- indeed ! I don't suppose he had ever denied himself anything which his large paws could clutch -- woman, food, drink, hard cash, the brow-beating of weaker men. He would be lavish to himself even in his capacity for producing sweat, and in the furor of war I could imagine him a stinking neighbour. Which all goes to show that I was nauseated by the fellow, and his unpleasant nearness to Isolda. I had the feeling that a man like Horwood would stop at nothing and a locked door would not save a woman from being raped by him.

I jabbed the fork into the ground, and adjourned for half a pipe. I sat down on the river bank and looked across at that most sinister house. Horwood had waddled up to one of the umbrellas and was talking to a woman in a deck chair. I saw him turn and point in my direction and I seemed to catch a kind of belly laugh. So, I was a joke to The Meadows. And he thought that I was afraid of him. I bit hard on my pipe, and the strength in me simmered.

I knocked my pipe out, got up and went back to where I had left my pitchfork. I happened to glance again at the house and at one of the gable windows, I saw a figure. It appeared to be seated there. It was Isolda. Was she watching me while she saved ten minutes from her day's routine ? I did not wave to her but went on with the job of tossing hay. The stuff was pretty dry now, and up above there, John Strange and his chaps were loading and carrying it to the big Dutch barn in the rick-yard. I glanced once or twice at the window, and she was still there, like some solitary creature in a little secure niche high up in a white cliff.

II

The afternoon produced an embarrassing incident. We had begun to load a

cart with the hay from the ground just above the river, and I was pitching up the stuff to Strange on the wagon when I heard a voice.

“ Oh -- Mr. Byron.”

John Strange winked at me.

“ Lady down there, sir, in a punt.”

I faced about and saw Isis Wheatly, and I was not pleased. The punt was lying along our bank and Mrs. Wheatly was holding on to a willow bough, a very colourful figure in white and cerise. She beckoned to me and I made the best of it, and went to speak to her.

“ Oh -- Mr. Byron, aren't you marvellous ! ”

Marvellous, was I ! Well, I did not want to be marvellous to this particular lady, though she looked at me as though I was a prize stallion.

“ Just giving a hand in a crisis.”

“ Aren't you brown. I only came down today. George is busy with some new company or other. He will be down for the week end.”

I rather wished that George was floating with her instead of being involved in other flotations. Moreover, I saw Isolda serving as waitress and carrying out a tea-tray to one of the lawn tables.

“ I'm sure your husband is a very busy man.”

John Strange was waiting on the hay-wain and time was precious.

“ You'll have to excuse me -- I'm holding up the loading.”

She giggled.

“ Do come and dine and dance with us on Saturday.”

I am afraid I lied to her.

“ So sorry. I have some friends for the week end.”

“ Why not bring them along ? ”

I laughed.

“ Unfortunately -- one of them is an old gentleman of seventy, and the other has a gammy leg. Yes, John -- coming.”

I gave her a Beau Geste smile, and returned to duty and the pitching of hay. I grinned up at John Strange and again he winked at me.

“Some lady, sir!”

“Say you! Has she pushed off?”

“She has, sir.”

III

The hay crop was in and John Strange a somewhat happier man, and on the Saturday morning I took the car and drove into Abbotsbridge. Saturday morning is always a Saturday morning war in such rural places, a shopping shemangle, chaotic with baskets and ladies who might have been hunting the last egg and the one lonely tin of treacle in a world that would blow up at midnight.

I managed to find a place to park the car, which was not easy, with bicycles propped precariously along the pavement and other cars left with their rumps sticking out into the road and left there by the privileged scene. I was nearly out of tobacco, and I wanted some gin and Burgundy and vodka, if they had any. Abbotsbridge did possess a passable little wine shop, and juice of the grape was becoming more purchasable and favour conferred on the customer's side of the counter.

I got tobacco, with a box of matches thrown in, and at “Smiths”, I caged a book, and bought two “Penguins.” The wine-shop lay just beyond the church, and the hour was 10.15. Fifteen silly minutes to wait before our ridiculous fussmayor would permit me to emerge with a bottle of gin. I might have carried it into the church at 10.31 and got disgustingly drunk on it, and the wine-merchant would have incurred no responsibility. I had a haversack with me, and the shop door was unlocked. I entered and found myself face to face with Isolda.

I think both were rather flummoxed by the unexpectedness of the thing. She was wearing the frock I had seen her in at Paddington, and the same little knitted cap of gold upon her hair. Our greetings were quite formal.

“ Good morning, Miss Mallory.”

“ Good morning, Mr. Byron.”

We two and the manager were alone in the shop. Isolda had a slip of paper in one hand -- a shopping list. She sat down on a high chair and smiled at me a little remotely.

“ You had better take my turn.”

“ Not a bit of it.”

“ I have a rather large order for the club.”

I glanced at the clock.

“ I am not yet legally entitled to walk out with a bottle of gin. I saw a police constable by the telephone booth.”

I and the manager smiled at each other, and I sat down on a second vacant chair and waited.

As she had said, her list was a long one, and the order a delivery affair. The manager was very polite to her, as well he might be. I had sampled the club's drinks, and their prices, and I will admit that Horwood's drinks were as honest as his prices were dishonest. I glanced at the shelves, and saw some Burgundy, and a bottle of English vermouth, and while Isolda was checking her list, I asked the inevitable question.

“ Got any gin ? ”

“ Yes, Mr. Byron.”

“ And vodka ? ”

“ Sorry, sir. Just nine bottles came in and they have gone.”

I saw Isolda's head turn.

“ We are the guilty people -- take one off my list for Mr. Byron.”

“ That's very gracious of you, Miss Mallory.”

" I don't think so."

The manager produced my bottle of gin and one of vodka, and two of Pommard. I paid, and was packing them into my haversack when Isolda rose.

" To our monthly account, Mr. Slade."

" That's all right, Miss."

I went to open the door for her.

" I have a car here. Can I give you a lift ? "

" There's a bus, Mr. Byron."

" Quite so. One an hour, and a sardine tin on wheels. I can wait if you have more to do."

She gave me an oblique look and no smile.

" It's very kind of you."

" Not a bit. I should call it common sense, and a rational use of petrol."

That brought a smile from her.

" I'll accept -- common sense."

" Splendid -- It rather reminds me of Paddington."

Had I said the wrong thing ? Anyhow she did not jab at it. We passed a young constable at the telephone booth and he glanced at my haversack. I grinned at him.

" Heard the church clock, officer ? "

He had, and he returned my grin.

We walked along Abbotsbridge High Street to where I had left the car. I say -- walked. It was like dodging a bus queue that was in motion all over the path. Someone banged my bag, and the bottles protested. Opening car doors caused more consternation. Two young mothers with prams sailed down on us, two abreast, gabbling to each other, and claiming the whole pavement. I stopped in front of them and raised my hat.

" Where do we go from here, ladies ? Into the gutter or through a shop window ? "

They gave me surprised and saucy looks, but I stood there in front of Isolda, and one of them had to hold back. We passed on, and so did they and I heard one say to the other "Cheeky bounder -- that."

So we came to my car and a problem. One feminine bike with loaded shopping basket was propped against the curb, and almost touching my near front mudguard. Another was equally prohibitive at the rear. Someone had parked a car three feet from the curb, blocking me in if I attempted to go forward. Nor could I reverse, for another car was almost on my tail. I suppose that in these exaggerated, shop-spoiling days, people can be crassly stupid, if one calls it nothing else.

"Bit of a problem here."

I opened the rear door for Isolda.

"Better get in and wait, Miss Mallory. Patience is still a virtue. Or -- is it?"

"I wonder!"

She got in and took my haversack from me and placed it on the seat beside her. And then the young constable of the telephone booth came strolling up, and I put the problem to him.

"What do I do now, officer?"

He looked at the bikes and the car parked well out in the roadway.

"I'll wait, sir. Hope it's a gentleman."

It wasn't. A tough, frowsy looking dame emerged from a cake shop and scuffled to the car. My young friend accosted her.

"Is that your car, madam?"

"It is."

"May I suggest that you can be summoned for parking a car like that?"

"And why, if I may ask?"

"If you can't see that, madam, well ----"

She frazzled at him.

" I don't want any impertinence, thank you. If you police would organize this better."

" I will try to do so -- now, madam, will you please move your car. And I will take your name and number for future reference."

She banged in and started her engine, and with a glare at him, was off with a jerk and without looking in her mirror. A car coming up behind blared and braked and just managed to miss her.

I smiled at the constable.

" Congratulations on your courtesy, officer. Not easy to organize selfish fools."

He grinned at me.

" Ladies, -- sir ! "

I appreciated his irony.

He moved the forward bike for me, and I got in and managed to ease my way out.

She was sitting in the back seat and directly behind me so that I could not see her. It seemed a rather unfriendly arrangement, but I had a feeling that she might prefer it. Also, I wanted to make some sort of indirect approach to her, and it might be easier when we were not face to face.

I had to brake to avoid a girl cyclist who turned right without a signal.

" Not very helpful, my dear ! All those good women seem to be slightly mad."

Her reaction surprised me.

" Many of them are, Mr. Bryon -- poor wenches."

" You mean ---- ? "

" Life isn't very easy for most women nowadays."

Had I been reproved, and perhaps rightly so ?

" The forty hour week, but not for women ? "

She did not answer me for a moment.

"It is a little more subtle than that."

"Well, tell me ---- "

"Man can be so like a careless, untidy urchin. A distinctive little beast."

"And woman has to tidy up after him."

Again there was a pause, and I had a feeling that I was in very shallow water, and she -- in the deeps of reality.

"I think I know what you mean."

"Do you ? "

"Why shouldn't I ? "

"You have so much."

"Well, tell me at once that I have lived and live a very protected life."

"I think you have."

That piqued me. A protected life ? Does she regard me as a creative and a spoilt playboy ? I was successful and secure. Well, wasn't I ? And she ---- ?

I said, "Sorry, Miss Mallory, you may be right. Things go deeper than bank balances and press photographs. Life has treated me kindly. Is it all luck ? "

There was a pause. I was driving slowly. I wanted to make the journey last as long as possible.

"I wonder, Mr. Byron, it may be that caring too much for certain things -- makes us poor credulous fools."

"Meaning ? "

"I was thinking of the many women who may have to suffer -- because -- of men."

That astonished me, not as a bold statement, but because she had gone so far as to say it to me. I felt moved, assured, almost humbled. For the moment I did not know what to say to her.

But she was speaking again and in a very different voice, brightly, conventionally, and with deliberate intent.

“ Well, summer at last. You must have enjoyed that hay making.”

Was I to humour her, or challenge the change in the conversation ?

I decided to conform.

“ I did -- somehow a real sort of job.”

“ Did your back ache, Mr. Byron ? ”

Was she being ironic with me ?

“ Sympathy noted, Miss Mallory. I happen to be rather tough. Do women prefer men tough ? ”

She did not answer that question.

But we were nearing home and I heard a restless movement behind me.

“ Do you mind dropping me at the gate ? ”

“ Why shouldn't I drive you in ? ”

“ The gate if you don't mind.”

I understood her reason, and it was not a pleasant one.

“ Of course. Oh, by the way, I shall not be at the Club on Saturday.”

“ No.”

“ A Mrs. Wheatley wanted me to join them. I am afraid I told a white lie.”

I saw the gate ahead of me, and I drew in at the side of the road and got out to open the door for her, but she was out before I could serve her. She gave me one straight, steadfast look.

“ Thank you, Mr. Byron.”

“ I wish you had more to thank me for.”

She had no answer to that, but turned and walked towards the white gate-pillar of her prison. I felt it to be a prison.

- 11 -

I suppose we imaginative people are more sensitive to impressions than is the average person, and our sensitivities varies. It is like the weather, especially the English weather, and I could note occasions when the world of the senses became unbelievably vivid to me. It was as though some inward glow was projected upon it from within, visionary illumination, a psychic dawn or sunset. Even Merlin the Tree, stoic though he was, seemed to change his mood and his gestures. I have seen him dim and remote and then brilliant and nearer to me. Just atmosphere.

But what of our spiritual atmosphere ? I am one of those who cannot escape from a source of mystery nor would I wish to escape from it, or become the child of mere bricks and mortar. These several days when I felt fey, when I could divine things not evident to the material senses. I had but to put out a hand and draw aside a curtain and lo -- mystical things would be revealed to me.

What gaff to many of the young cynical moderns. Life might be all Brighton Rock to them, or Forever Amber, and if there was a fly in it, the creature was septic and stark. I think much of the trouble comes from our pseudo-intellectuals being isolated from the world of hands. I have found more ultimate wisdom in some of the simple folk who labour close to nature -- farm labours, shepherds, fishermen. They are less remote from the eternal challenge of doing things. If one loses one's capacity for marvelling, one is dead.

So, almost without realising it and as though the old house I dwelt in had eyes, I began to get a picture of the place over yonder and of her.

The Horwood world, a drinking den, a super-brothel, a gambling house, a retreat for some of the new rich who had more belly than brains. Harold Horwood was no fool. He knew how to cater for his world, and maybe it was a

profitable affair.

And he had some hold on Isolda.

Money ! Did she need money, and for what ? For someone other than herself ? I could suppose that gratuities might be considerable, largesse on chromium plate and that she might confront these fools and accept that which came to her, while holding them off with cool courtesy.

Also, I got the feeling that she was in danger and that her defences might be very thin. A locked door, and what was a locked door to an urgent and powerful brute like Horwood ? And were he to have his way with her by force, he would swear, were she to appeal to the Law -- that she had been a compliant partner. Keys can be turned in locked doors and if there is no key then a duplicate can be provided.

I expect that few men of the world will believe me when I say, that I did not credit what to then would have been obvious, she was Horwood's mistress. They would ask if any woman would accept such a post as her in such a home without being a creature of tarnish.

" My dear fellow, don't be such a sappy ass."

Half the lads in any public school could have said that to me.

Well, I just did not believe it, believe it who will.

II

It was one of those restless and active phases with me when sitting down to paint, as standing to it, was out of the picture.

Once again the weather had broken, and it was windy and gray and as restless as my romantic self. Romantic -- as a contemporary adjective conveys but a kindly and superior sneer, if nothing else. It is supposed to pass with youth, if youth is ever romantic, to become a sensualised sex-urge in the fierce forties and to retire in the senile sixties, unless the

patriarch belongs to the pinch-bottom fraternity. Yet, even a romantic can be capable of honour, and I wondered how Horwood would be served were he to try that trick upon a certain person.

The Meadows was a somewhat shut-up house that week. No yellow umbrellas on the lawn, no punts upon the river, and the week-end crowd did not appear to be as plentiful as usual. I paid it no visit, in spite of my restlessness. Angelo came down on the Wednesday, and we had an hour with the foils on the lawn between the river and the house. I was not in form, but like a piece of wild vine, and he pinked me thrice.

“Brittle, sir, brittle.”

Brittle? That word rather expressed it, and Angelo's brown eyed smile challenged me. I have heard the Italians abused but personally I had found them the kindest of people. Ask some of our escaped prisoners who were fed and helped by the contadini.

I said, “True, my friend. Your English is as quick as your foil.”

“It is a great language, sir.”

We tried again and I proposed to be more deliberate and flexible until I caught sight of a passing punt with someone standing up and poling it. Isolda. She was looking up at us, and that put me off guard. Angelo touched me over the heart. How significant!

I laughed and saluted the punt with raised foil, and she waved to me.

“Well and surely touched, Angelo.”

He gave me a shrewd look. He was as quick witted as was his foil.

III

I had phoned Jimmy Slaughter and asked him to come down and lunch on the Sunday. In fact, I had written and asked him to pick up any information he could pick up on a certain person's background. It rained

on Sunday, but Jimmy arrived in a merry mood with an admirable black eye. One of his sparring partners had scored somewhat unexpectedly.

"Well, well, well," said I.

"Good for one's vanity, sir."

"And what did you do to him?"

"Stood him an extra drink."

That was Jimmy all over. And at lunch he drank nothing but cider.

I know that Jimmy and his crowd thought me an innocent sort of bloke, but rather liked me for it. Moreover, Jimmy was not the riotous lad he sometime pretended to be, and as a fighter, he had to keep fit, and he had had adventures of his own. I don't know whether any of you men who may read this have felt the urge to play the castigation of snide cads and impudent bullies, but Jimmy had fallen for that inspiration. Drive a fast car he did, but he drove it like a gentleman, and I believe his adventure in castigation had been prompted by the rudeness of the open road. It had begun with the blackguardian of a lousy driver on his way to Covent Garden, who, in Vauxhall or somewhere near there, had taken Jimmy's side of the road and pushed James on to the grass verge. Jimmie had turned, chased him, and pulled his car across the road and proceeded to lecture the fellow and the chap -- being arrogant and hefty, had left his seat and accepted the challenge. I can picture the licking James had given him, and the incident had so piqued my friend that he had taken to himself the duty of dealing with other arrogant cads. There was nothing of the bully in James. He could be the quietest and most unboastful of creatures, but the bully aroused the mischievous devil in him.

"Well, any scuttlebutt on my new neighbour?"

Jimmy had some. One or two of his pals had had tales to tell. It would appear that Horwood had been an amateur heavy weight in his day, and had thrown his weight about. He and an ex-Army tough had acted as chuckem-

outs in his own particular London night-club, until -- as I had suspected -- the place had come by so sinister a reputation that Horwood had closed it or sold it and came down to exploit a more eclectic and elevated show in simple Surrey.

“ Not a nice person, James.”

“ Not at all, sir. He knows how to exploit the cash crowd that wants sensation.”

“ What you would call a Spiv. I have never met one. Are there such people ? ”

“ Plenty. Knocked up against one last week who wanted to sell me a case of whisky at five quid a bottle.”

“ And did you knock him ? ”

“ No, just a dainty little tyke, not worth knocking.”

I did not tell James about Isolda, but I did confess that I had become a member of the club -- for reasons of my own.

“ Doing a bit of detecting ? ”

I nodded at him and grinned.

“ I wouldn't mind getting the place shut up. I don't like the fellow, or the crowd he trades on.”

“ Has he been rude to you ? ”

“ He has. I rather believe he thinks me a cissy.”

James chuckled.

“ That means more than you're not wanted,” and his face became serious, “ I'd watch out for yourself if you ever get into a row over there.”

“ Meaning ? ”

“ That sort of beast can be nasty, all sorts of dirty tricks.”

“ I think he is flabby, my lad.”

“ Maybe he is, but he might have a rough house on you.”

My pipe had gone out and I relit it.

" By the way, do you know if the fellow has a wife ? "

Jimmy gave me one of his measuring looks.

" Wife ? That sort doesn't indulge in holy matrimony. Just make do with anything in petticoats that's bed worthy and willing."

I blew smoke.

" Just a male fly-paper."

" That's about it."

Something in me flinched from further crass realities and I eased the conversation on to a more impersonal subject.

IV

I was nearer to further knowledge than I knew. Having given The Meadows a wide berth during the weekend so that I should not become involved with Mrs. Wheatly, I strolled across on the Tuesday evening with the excuse of a little drink before dinner. If the week-end crowd had not swallowed all the Martini, I would have one. My real purpose was -- as you may assume -- was otherwise.

It happened to be a fine evening, but the place seemed deserted. Two couples were sitting in deck chairs down by the river, and one of our migrant swans was cruising near the bank, hoping for largesse. I turned in though the French window of the bar and found the place empty. Nothing but bottles, and a cigarette end still smoking in a glass ashtray.

I strolled out again and saw a chair not far from the window of Horwood's office. The window was open, and I heard voices. I sat down noiselessly in the chair.

Horwood and Isolda.

I heard Horwood say with throaty smugness, " You could have the brat here, you know, but upon one condition. And you know what that is, -- my

dear."

What a strange method of soliciting favours ! Was the big brute so sure of himself ?

She was silent for some seconds, and I heard his laugh.

" Queer wench, aren't you ? "

" Some things don't occur to you."

" Men rather sick-making -- what ? "

" In my experience, yes."

" Well, if you want the little bastard -- here ---- "

" Not on such terms."

" Oh, well, please your sweet prudish self. Where is she tucked away at the moment ? "

" I think that is my affair."

" Quite so -- Go get me a gin and tonic. And have one yourself if you feel like it."

I left the chair and strolled across the lawn, and then turned and walked to the French window so as to make it appear I was making a first entry. I found her behind the bar, with a gin bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. It made me angry that she should have to serve like this. Her back was turned, and I don't think she heard me, and so I surprised her in one of those moments of desolation when human courage fails. She set the glass and bottle down on the ledge below the shelves, and put her hands to her face and pressed hands and face against a shelf as though she felt giddy and faint. Was I moved ? I was and deeply so, and yet I wondered whether my being here would be less than welcome to her -- unless ---- . And then I saw her raise the glass and drink the neat spirit and that too shocked me.

I had not made a sound, but she must have divined some presence, for she turned and saw me, and I saw anger in her eyes ! Yes, perhaps more than anger, for anger might cover up humiliation. Her face was bleached and

hard.

I made myself smile at her.

"Just strolled over to see if you have any of that vodka left."

She placed the glass and bottle on the bar counter.

"We have, Mr. Bryon."

"May I have one? And will you join me?"

She filled the glasses, deliberately and in silence, and I felt challenged by the knowledge that had come to me. So, she had a child, and I was beginning to understand.

"Excuse me a moment."

I know what her job was, and I perched on a stool and did not watch her as she went to deliver that drink to Horwood. I heard their voices faintly in the distance, and his was provocative and suborning. He wanted her to drink with him, and I felt my muscles tighten. A short silence rather like a deep drawn breath, and she was back in the bar. I was twiddling my glass, and I did not look at her.

She stood there in front of me, her hands resting on the counter. She had recovered her poise, and was head up and vaguely hostile. Was I never to be trusted or regarded even as a friend?

"Aren't you going to drink your little drink?"

She was looking past me at a window, and I seemed to see her eyes focused upon some other and absent creature. Was it the child and was I being sentimental? And was she still angry with me for surprising her in that moment of weakness? I raised my glass, hesitated, and put it down.

That gesture seemed to bring her back to me.

"I don't think I want mine."

"Well, I'll refrain too -- if you feel that way -- But I pay, of course."

I felt for my wallet, and laid a ten shilling note on the counter. She looked at it.

"They will do -- for other people. Please put that back."

Our eyes met for a moment. Then, I pushed my glass away, picked up the note and returned it to my wallet.

"Are you sure you can work them off?"

"Quite sure."

And then a man's head appeared at a window.

"Oh -- Bella, can we have two vodkas out in the garden?"

"Yes, Mr. Summers ; I'll bring them to you."

She waited until the fellow had gone and then placed our two drinks on a tray, and gave me a sudden, half bitter smile. It said, "I told you so. The craving here is regular and insatiable." I watched her carry our two glasses into the garden, and I felt that we had some share in material abstinence. This razzled world might be as stale and repulsive to her as a perpetual hangover.

I heard footsteps and a voice.

"Morning, Mr. Byron."

I turned on my stool and saw those blatant blue eyes regarding me curiously.

"What -- all alone, and not drinking?"

"Miss Mallory is servicing someone out there."

"What will you have?"

"Nothing -- thanks."

"Abstemious fellow."

I liked his facetiousness as little as I liked his suspicious face, and I could sense his urbane hostility.

I said -- "I can pay for the stool -- if you like, Mr. Horwood."

He smiled at me.

"I am sure the honour is ours, Mr. Byron. We really should pay you for sitting on it."

" Can I stand you something ? "

" Thank you, no. I rather prefer cooperation."

I laughed, for I had glimpsed Isolda at the window.

" Well, I'll have a glass of water. What's yours, Mr. Horwood ? "

He gave me a sudden glare.

" Nothing, thanks," and he turned and walked out, but his footsteps ceased in the lounge. I supposed that he had sat down there to listen.

Did he suspect that my glass of water was mere camouflage, and that I had other reasons for my visit ?

His glibness had irritated me. He was quick enough with his tongue, and I did not like him any the better for that. And he thought me a cissy and a playboy and was squatting there like some night-club porter summing up a dubious guest and a situation. Isolda was back behind the bar, and I knew that she was unaware of Horwood's intervention.

" Do you think I could have a glass of water, Miss Mallory ? "

She looked at me with sudden curious intentness.

" Of course, Mr. Byron."

She turned for a glass and jug of water, and filled it for me, and as she placed it on the bar-counter her eyes seemed to question my choice of so innocent a drink. I nodded at her and smiled. I was giving nothing away to Horwood, and I began to talk books and pictures to her in a chatty and conventional way. She listened, but rather with an air of puzzled patience, for I should imagine such conversational efforts were unique in a place such as this. It piqued me to picture Horwood squatting there listening to me playing the bookish bore.

Then a couple came into the bar, and I glanced at my watch, and got off my stool.

" Lunch. One mustn't offend one's cook."

I reached the lounge in time to see Horwood closing the door of his

office, and I chuckled. Playing at Listening Tom had not brought him any significant information.

Isolda's Diary

After all, we are only bags of instincts and emotions, even though some of the bags are made of silk. I have often wondered about woman who take the veil? Do they rid themselves of all emotion by the negation method of starvation? A happier solution would be for one's urges and impulses to be directed into right and wholesome channels, flowing inevitably like the river down yonder.

That is what I wish for the child. Happiness and some belief in the essential kindness of certain people.

Thank heavens she seems happy down there. Good creatures -- the Payellys.

So, we met shopping in Abbotsbridge. He has manners and a happy way of dealing with people and things. Also there seems to be a new sort of subtlety in his attitude towards me. He has restraint, and a half playful courtesy, and he does not try the usual male tricks. I like him, but how can I like him -- unless ----? And, my God, is he in earnest about something?

That scares me. What if he knew the whole truth?

And Horwood? I have begun to realize that Horwood would be beast enough to tell him the truth.

Oh -- how I need a comrade, someone who could understand and believe in me, in spite of the past. I want reassuring. I'm not so self sure as I was so.

And if he cared could he play the old-fashioned hero, thrash the villain and rescue the maiden? Maiden! My dear, you really are becoming silly!

Yet, how I would like to see him thrash that arrogant brute. He can fence, and row and run, and I believe he can box. Has he that other stuff in him, the lovely and generous rage which is the only thing that matters to a woman when she is in a corner like I am?

Of course the solution is obvious. I should chuck this job and just disappear.

- 12 -

So -- she had a child hidden away somewhere, a child who -- I gathered -- had been foisted upon her by a fellow named Carter. A war romance with a sordid ending? And where had it happened? I remembered Horwood's facetious remark about Vienna. God, that might explain my first impression of her, as someone not quite English, though she spoke our language perfectly. Was she an Austrian?

How strange are our reactions! I could suppose her to be the mother of an illegitimate child, and that any tenderness I might have felt for her would become mere mud, but it was not so. I seemed to see her as a tragic figure, alone in her world, severely disillusioned, and loathing the creature man. Was the child her one passion and her life at The Meadows a bitter means to an end? I believed so. She might hold a rather sinister world on the other side of a club bar, while cherishing one innocent thing as hers. And how The Meadows world would cackle at me and label me a silly sentimental sap.

I think I know now that I was in love with her, and so differently so from all my other affairs. Here was a most human challenge, something permeated with compassion and integrity, no mere illusion defying disillusionment. A man is given his choice, to feel the mystery and the goodness of great loving, or to play the casual cad and wound a creature whom some other man has wounded.

I don't pretend to any great virtue, but that night I dreamed of her. Her face was close to mine, a stark yet appealing face, frozen in its voiceless mistrust. We just looked and looked at each other, and suddenly her face seemed to come alive. Her eyes become lit up like two lamps. We were smiling at each other and smiling at the great and lovely thing we shared.

When I woke I thought, "Can I make her look at me like that?"

I might have been waiting like some septuagenarian about an old man's darling, and yet -- there was wisdom in my self-restraint. I had a feeling that like some wild bird, she had to be made to realize that I was no killer with a gun.

In the days of Puritans she might have had to walk about with a red A embroidered upon her bosom, and the dear Victorians would have passed her by with sweeping skirts and forbidding faces. As for the child, poor little creature. I could remember my father telling me how as a very small boy he had toddled into a drawing room full of black satin and virtue, and asked his father a devastating question.

"Father, what is a har-lot?"

What the answer had been I do not know, but I can imagine the icy atmosphere.

Or were the good Victorians secretly amused and glad of a squib exploding in the virtuous atmosphere? I have often wondered about these days of ours in their contrasts and their inhibitions. I think -- perhaps -- we are kinder and easier to live with, more tolerant, more facilely frail, and perhaps less ready to damn our neighbours.

Well, that same week I saw a thing that moved me. I happened to be standing at the gallery window which overlooked the road when I saw her come out of the Meadows' gate. She paused and looked back -- she had something white in her hand. A hundred yards or so along the road a red letter box had been let into a brick pillar. She was hatless, and her haste was only too evident. She went swiftly down the road, and slipped the white thing into the posting-box, paused, looked left and right and then as though the secret deed was safely done, strolled back to the white gate at her leisure.

I would have given much to have seen the address upon the envelope.

II

On that particular Saturday, cars began arriving early. It was a honey of a day, like some "Lovely" in a queue of formidable matrons. I had been restless and quite unable to settle down to work. I had tried to book a dinner table at The Meadows but been fobbed off by Horwood, in person.

"Sorry, Byron, we can't cater for solitaires."

So, I had been just Byron to him, and his attitude towards me was that of the hard-boiled man of the world to a young fellow who was a bit of a fool. I had played him up, and the debtor balance was piling up against him.

"Couldn't you fit me out with -- a partner?"

He had turned his big back on me as though to suggest that if I hadn't the guts to get a girl on my own, I was even less than a cissy.

Betty fixed me up with an early dinner, though most post-war meals have to be improvisations, but Betty did not belong to the cabbage-school. I told Bill that I was taking the key and that they were not to sit up for me. The westering sun was shining full face on The Meadows. The place was all glare, even as to the polish of its crowding cars. There was a burble from the bar, and the garden tables were garlanded with dinner jackets and fluorescent frocks.

It was to be very much a gin and giggles night, with relays of dinners and diners and dancing as much as you please. The summer night and the garden might cater for those who asked for emotional interludes. The dance-band was tuning up in the lounge as I entered, and its leader -- a young man with a flat head and an immense walrus moustache bobbed a greeting at me. I rather like these lads who had to make merry by making mad music for this crowd. Most of them were ex R.A.F. pilots who had seen life in the rough and were finding life tough and rough after the War.

The first series of dinners was being served. There was a small dance-

floor in the dining room, but at The Meadows, you just danced where and how as you pleased. I can well remember catching a very cuddlesome couple dancing a rumba or something in the passage leading to the cloak-room. I strolled into the bar and it was crammed. I saw Isolda there in a saffron frock with a little puny fellow who looked like a Maltese, helping her. She saw me and gave me a swift flicker of a smile. There was nowhere to sit and I did not need a drink, so I went and stood by an open window and savoured the scene. I looked for the Wheatlys and did not see them and felt relieved.

Horwood came oiling in, urbane and chatty, and passing glib jabber with all and sundry. His pouched cheeks looked redder than usual and that slime of hair across his forehead very much a signature tune. He saw me and strolled over.

“What about a glass of water, sir?”

“Thank you,” I said, “I take my cold tub in the morning.”

The band started up. I had a glimpse of the lounge. Couples were dancing there and two or three became active in the crowded bar. I was watching them when I saw a very large man with a white waistcoat and a paunch waddle in. He wore an eye-glass in a bladder of lard face, and his mouse coloured hair was carefully trimmed to conceal an incipient baldness. I don't know why, but I am prejudiced against men who sport monocles.

He eased his way towards the bar, and found a gap opposite Isolda.

I heard him say, “Come and perform, Bella.”

She gave him a non-consenting movement of the head. It suggested that she was too busy, and that the invitation was not in order. And then I saw, Horwood intervene. He made a sign to her, an order to conform. I gathered that Mr. Bladder of Lard must be a particularly important person.

I acted on impulse, with a flare of anger. Why should she be ordered to dance with that fat brute. I was reminded of that scene in “Bitter Sweet.”

To reach the flap in the bar counter, Isolda had to move in my direction, and my Lord Bladder of Lard was waiting for her to come to him. I moved quickly from the window to intercept her, and I gave her a little bow.

“ Will you dance with me, Miss Mallory ? ”

Her eyes were wide open with a scared appeal.

“ I’m afraid -- I ---- ”

And then she did a thing which astounded me. She fled, turning like a yellow flame blown by the wind towards the open French window. I stood there feeling shocked and guilty, and something of a fool. None of us followed her. I saw a scowling Horwood take her place behind the bar, and a moment or two later Mr. Bladder of Lard came looming up to me.

“ And who is Mr. Butts In ? ”

I looked at his unpleasant face with its supercilious monocle.

“ My name is Byron, if that is of any use to you.”

“ Don Juan, what. Cads should not scare a lady.”

I smiled at him and said quietly, “ If you want a show-down, sir, you can join me in the garden.”

He laughed.

“ Hardly worthwhile -- I think.”

Horwood had come to the end of the bar, and his face was ugly.

“ I’m available, -- Mr. Byron, if you wish it.”

“ Thanks, Mr. Harwood -- I don’t think that a row is necessary.”

He gave me kind of a gloating grin.

“ I see you cultivate caution.”

I did not care a damn what he thought of my fighting capacity or my courage. In fact, I was pleasantly provoked by his assumption that I could not and would not face up to him. If shock-tactics had to be used some day, his disillusionment might be all the more stimulating. I turned and walked out into the garden. I wanted to find her, and abase myself if I had

hurt her. Dusk was falling with a liquid sky in the west, slashed with a streak of crimson, and the chairs under the yellow umbrellas were empty. I could not see her anywhere. And then -- one of those fantastic panic moods seized me. My picture, and the river and a dead girl floating ! I went sprinting down towards the river.

And then I saw her sitting on the bank under a willow, and her saffron frock was like a flower in the blue green gloom. Her elbows were on her knees, her hands clasping her face. There was an utter stillness about her which was more moving than any live emotion.

I went and stood behind her. I said, " Miss Mallory, I'm sorry. Forgive me, if ---- "

She did not move, and I felt voiceless. There seemed to be something poignant even in that dying sky. Did she wish to be alone, and was I indeed a clumsy butters-in ?

I said, " I'm afraid -- I -- was angry. I'll clean out if you wish it."

Her response astonished me.

" Why -- were you angry ? "

I sat down beside her, but not too near.

" Why ? Well, because I feel in a certain way about some things."

" Other men ? "

" Some sorts of men. You shouldn't have to ---- "

She was on her feet with one swift movement. She did not look at me, but her face was tense and distraught.

" I am going back now."

" May -- I ? "

" Please, no. I can carry on."

" May I walk to the house with you ? "

" If you wish."

Not a word passed between us as we crossed the grass to the lighted

window. She was about to enter when I reached out and caught her hand. Her fingers seemed to close impulsively on mine and to stay there for two seconds. Then she let my hand go, and passed in, and I watched her walk to her place behind the bar. Horwood was still there. I saw him give her a significant look and glance that seemed to say "So -- you have thought better of it, my lady."

I was conscious of feeling -- well what? Elation? No. There are moments when no words are adequate to express the mingled pattern of one's emotion. One's personal vanity may be as nothing or a cloak to be spread devoutly before some particular creation's feet. I had acted upon impulse and she had responded to it with those momentarily clinging fingers.

I wandered down, and back to the river and sat down under the tree where she had taken refuge. Had that panic moment of mine been actual and had she been drawn like Shakespeare's Ophelia to the dark water? Dark it was now, the shorn meadows paling under that fading sky. The tree above me was gray and black lace. No wind moved in it, and that crimson streak had changed into silver smoke. I raised the hand which she had held for a second or two and looked at it. The perfume of poignant feeling might have been there. Absurd though it may sound, I almost promised myself that I would not wash that touch away until she had told me more.

Isolda's Diary

Another scene in the bar. That pompous old pig, Sir Percival Gamble had been making a pass at me. A plutocrat and a lavish spender, and so to be toadied to.

Just why did he intervene? To flout Horwood, or because he did not like the idea of my dancing with that lascivious old rhino?

I'm afraid I lost my head. Most certainly he did not like him or his temper. I wish to God he would lose his temper with Harwood. But what would that mean?

He followed me down to the river. There was a gentleness about him that comforted me, and gave me courage. And he said some strange things which keep running in my mind. It was about as if he knew.

Oh -- well, am I falling in love with him?

He walked back with me, and we held hands for two seconds.

I feel new courage, yes and a new fear.

- 13 -

Sunday. I was at breakfast when Bill bought me a letter which had been delivered by hand. Bill said that he had heard someone come to the house and the clack of the letterbox flap and he had come to a porch window and saw a fellow in his shirt sleeves walking away towards the main gates.

I looked at the envelope. The handwriting was fluid and emphatically thick, with a curved flourish below my name. It was indeed a gesture, a kind of "That's that, good sir. Sit up and take notice." I guessed who that letter had come from. It was steady and black like the slime of hair on his forehead.

I opened it and read.

Sir --

In view of your behaviour to one of my guests,
I must inform you that you are no longer a member
of the club. In the future you will not enter my gate.

Harold Horwood.

An ultimatum, and with a fat flourish ! Did he think that he would get rid of me so easily, or that I might funk a show-down with him ? So, the battle was on. I filled myself a second cup of coffee and felt good.

Jimmy was coming down for lunch and I was glad of Mr. James Slaughter. He arrived early and I took him by the arm and shepherded him into the studio.

"I want a go with you, James. Try out my form."

He grinned at me.

"Got a date with someone ? "

"Possibly."

"Who's the cad?"

"Our friend over the way."

We took off our coats and put on the gloves and I set about James with gusto. In fact, I boxed so fast and was in such form that I got in a right on the chin, and shook him for the moment. I dropped my hands.

"Sorry, Jim."

He laughed.

"You -- are -- in form. What's the stimulus?"

"Cad's blood."

"Sorry for him -- if you get going to be like this. Put 'em up."

And then, without meaning it, a perk up because I failed to block the blow and Jimmy landed a beauty over my right eye. It pulled my head back and shook me, and instantly he dropped his hands.

"I say -- sorry, I thought you'd block it."

I looked at him.

"All square, James. I laid myself too open. Come on."

But he kept his hands down.

"Afraid you're going to have a good one. What about a cold compress?"

"Well, if I am ----"

"Won't do. Distinguished artist parading in a black eye. Enough for a morning."

So we took off the gloves and I soaked a handkerchief and cold water and lay down on the settee with the pad over my eyes. Jimmy appeared to be absurdly concerned about it. He lit a pipe, but only took a few puffs at it.

II

A black eye is very much a black eye and though you may talk of walking

into gate posts in the dark, even the least cynical of mortals will not believe you. It was absurd how conscious I was of that adornment, almost like a girl who has developed a herpes on her lip the day before she is to meet her chosen lad. Which goes to show that I possessed more vanity than I had allowed for. I kept to the river for a day or two, and actually did some work on a fantastic thing which I had put aside when the mood had failed in me, but I was restless and could not forget how her fingers had clung to mine.

That a black eye might prove to be a badge of honour had not occurred to me. I was out early in my skiff and had gone up the river. Sculling back down stream, I took an easy just above The Meadows and let my boat drift. I was fairly close in to The Meadows bank, and then I saw her under that same willow.

I made myself smile at her but no smile came back to me. She looked at me in a queer, considering way, yet almost flinchingly as though my nice bruise suggested some more sinister origins. I backed water, and held the skiff opposite the willow.

I said, "I suppose you know that my membership has been cancelled?"

She nodded and it seemed to me, that she saw nothing but that damned bruise. I laughed.

"Yes, I got this boxing with a friend, the famous Jimmy Slaughter."

I doubt whether she had even heard of Jimmy Slaughter, but her face softened. One can try to put into words certain subtle facial changes, and mere words fail one. There can be a liquid warmth in the eyes, a melting of the mouth, emotion partly concealed and yet manifesting like the light on water.

"I was rather afraid it was my fault."

The I understood her. She had thought that Howard might have beaten me up after that affair with the Monocle.

"No, just a friendly punch. I don't suppose you have ever heard of James Slaughter."

"No."

"Well, you don't read the sports page in the dailies. Jimmy is pretty famous. He comes down now and again and we put on the gloves. It's a hobby of mine."

I became conscious of her eyes regarding me as man, man in his completeness of muscle and bruised skin. It sent a queer shiver of shy exultation through me. Did she see me as a man might wish to be seen by woman and by a particular woman, a clean, strong, fighting creature who could be trusted to defend what was his? The sunlight was behind her, and her hair glowed.

"I'm glad."

What was she glad of? That I was strong, and somehow fit and clean to her and not like the casual cads up there. And then I saw him in the white porch, legs a-straddle, his turgid face observing us. She might have been warned for she turned her head and saw him. The way her face hardened and her eyes darkened moved me.

I said, "Isolda, if you ever have any trouble, send for me."

Her face might have been lit up by her hair. She stood for a moment looking at me with more colour in her cheeks, and her eyes were dewing.

"I can manage."

"My dear," said I, "You can trust me. God knows. I am no saint, but I don't belong to that show. I mean what I say."

"Thank you."

She gave me a look such as I had never had from her before. Head high, she moved away along the bank with a deliberate and easy grace. She could walk as beautifully as she could dance. I had a last glimpse of her profile, and her fit, lithe figure and the curves of her breasts. I would have said

that fear and stress had gone out of her and that she went out upon her way like some un-selfconscious and care-free child.

I turned to look at Horwood. He was up there watching us and I backed my boat in a little closer to the bank. Would he walk down and intercept her? And if he did and played the bully I knew that I should jump ashore and beat the life out of him. But when he did move, it was in my direction. He came slowly down the slope like some arrogant menacing bull.

“Morning, Mr. Byron.”

I saw a smirk spread across his face. He had become alive to my black eye.

“Morning,” said I.

I watched his blatant blue eyes as I would have watched the eyes of a boxer.

“You seem interested in the river.”

“I am.”

“Had a spot of trouble somewhere, I’m afraid.”

“Just a friendly scrap. By the way -- I am not accepting that notice of yours.”

“Is that so? Well, Mr. Byron, if you trespass -- your other eye might suffer.”

I put my head back and laughed, for the man in me was full of love and laughter.

“Thanks for the hint, Horwood. I may accept the invitation. It will depend on other things. Good morning.”

And I dug my sculls in and left him, and I am afraid my sculling was full of swagger. Nor did pride come before a fall and I caught no crab nor made a mess of my steering and fouled the bank. He stood there watching me, and I rubbed my skill and strength as a sculler into him and wondered if he might suspect that I was as glib with my fists.

But my laughter had been for Horwood, and not for her, for her’s was no

laughing world in that most sinister house. Just how much did she mean to that blatant beast? Was she no more than a colourful decoy for his most unpleasant crowd, or was she woman? I realized that a man like Horwood would stop at nothing and that magnanimity and compassion were mere dust on the world's floor. It has been said that no man is without some quality of goodness and that the complete villain is more melodrama, but where Horwood kept any such quality must have been in his boots. Shakespeare -- I always seem to be quoting that great humanist -- had given us some complete and recalcitrant scoundrels and I was minded to agree with him. In this much more Tom, Dick and Harry world of ours the human passions are clad in somewhat reach-me-down-clothes. "Decent" describes the modern hero, and even the blackguard is regarded as a tame sort of mountebank who might be dealt with quite kindly on the Flicks.

How much the "Grand Manner" was surface -- I cannot say. Gossip has it that the great William was wedded to a shrew and his Juliets and Desdemonas may have been creative contrasts. One may be moved by a woman's bosom, her mouth, her hair, her eyes, but I think it is the complete portrait that manifests to man's more romantic and spiritual self. Had I been an old gentleman writing a love story, I think it would have told itself somewhat like this diary of mine, save that old gentleman could not have commanded the final punch.

Strangely enough, this old house of mine seemed to entertain both me and some ultimate human wisdom, a wisdom which permeated my feeling about this. Hurtfield must have known evil as well as good, but to me its inward self was gentle and benign and reassuring.

One walks trustfully into some houses. No treachery waits for you in them, and they have no dark corner where suspicion lurks. Maybe this old house of mine spoke to me in the watches of the night.

"Life is nothing without good faith. Trust and you shall be trusted."

Yes, that was my problem, to gain her trust completely, without guile.
Her faith in life and love had been shattered and my job was to restore it.
And she too had someone to defend against things scabrous and revolting.
I found myself wondering about her child.

Isolda's Diary

I was out early for a little clean air and some peace when I saw him coming up the river in his skiff.

What a pretty rhythm in it, full of strength and grace. I stood by some of the willows and waited, there was excitement in me. And then he drew level and saw me and stopped the boat, and eased it close to the bank. His smile was a boyish grin.

One of his eyes was black and swollen

I kind of held my breath.

He laughed.

"No, quite a legitimate casualty. I was boxing yesterday with a friend and it just happened."

"It must have hurt."

"Not much. Have you heard of Jimmy Slaughter?"

I had not.

"Is that the name of your friend?"

"Yes. Pretty famous person in the ring. Light heavyweight champion."

"Do you box with champions?"

"On sufferance. He could knock my head off if he wanted to."

I smiled at him.

"The keeping fit idea?"

The smile he gave me back set my heart going faster. He had edged the boat into the bank.

"Isolda, there's something I want to say -- May I?"

"Can I stop you?"

"If ever you have trouble over there -- send for me."

Trouble! I felt dumb, rather helpless.

"Promise?"

I nodded at him, and fled, but halfway up the lawn I turned and waved to him and he waved back.

Oh, my dear soul, does a black eye make a woman love a man ?

- 14 -

Yet another coincidence was waiting for me. We are served in the morning by a poor, half-wit postman, a fellow who was badly knocked about in the war. Every now and again he muddles up his letters, and I found one that should have gone elsewhere tucked in among mine.

Miss Mallory
The Meadows Hotel and Country Club
Stoke Mandville
Surrey

Miss Mallory ! The writing on the envelope was round and rustic and feminine. The postmark was somewhat blurred, but I managed to decipher it. St. Mawes -- well, well, well ! That little colourful place in Cornwall had known me many a time. I sat and stared at the letter, and remembered that day at Paddington. Had she been coming from St. Mawes on that June day ? Oh, most probably. And St. Mawes might hold her secret and her child.

How tempted I was to try and open that letter, read it, and reseal the flap of the envelope, but I might have made a mess of it.

Moreover, I was not so modern in my outlook that I could have felt no qualms about prying into her privacy. That would have been a Horwood gesture, and in spite of the old saying, everything is not fair in love and war. It is just because anything is allowed to the ingenious devil in modern man that humanity has found itself in such a catastrophic mess.

My first impulse was to repost the letter in the pillar box down the lane, but I changed my mind about it. I would deliver it in person, and see that it reached her safely, so I strolled across to The Meadows and ran slap into

Horwood at the porch door. The letter was in my pocket, and I had no intention of passing it to him.

He barred my way.

"Trespassing, Mr. Byron."

I was in an easy mood, and I smiled at him.

"Yes, in a sense, I suppose I am."

"I might accept an apology."

"For what?"

"I don't think you are quite such a facile fool, Mr. Byron."

He made no move, and I looked him in the eyes.

"As a matter of fact, I have a letter for Miss Mallory. It was delivered to us by mistake."

"You can hand it to me, Mr. Byron."

"I prefer to deliver it in person."

He did not budge, and still looking him in the face, I put out a hand and rang the bell. Was the explosion imminent and inevitable? He lowered there close to me and I was ready for zero hour if it had arrived -- my muscles tense, and my heart beating hard and fast. I was taller than he was, and so close were we to each other that the raddled redness of his skin and a certain bleariness about his eyes filled me with a kind of gloating nausea. Did this turgid cad imagine that he could either fight or cower me?

One of his dago waiters came shuffling across the hall, and Howard turned.

"Tell Miss Mallory, she is wanted."

He faced me again, and I put my hands in my trouser pockets, and leaned against one of the pillars. His large and paunchy face was enigmatic, but I began to suppose that there would be no explosion. He was a cunning brute and his intention was to supervise the interview and perhaps get a

glimpse of that letter. Then I saw Isolda crossing the lounge, and I straighten and nodded at her.

It was he who spoke as though playing the master of ceremonies.

"Oh -- Bella, Mr. Byron has a letter for you."

Then he looked at me and held out a hand, and I smiled straight into his eyes. I was feeling easy now, and I kept my fists in my pockets. I ignored that hand of his, and drew back a step or two.

"Miss Mallory, if you will come out into the garden -- I will explain."

He gave me an angry glare. I was out-manning him, and he knew it. For a moment he hesitated, and then stood aside and let her pass. I was watching her face. She slipped past him almost like a child who half feared that some savage paw might clutch her. I think it was the first time that I had seen the frightened child in her, and it moved me to great gentleness.

I said, "Let's go down to the river for a minute or two."

Her lashes quivered as she glanced at me. I wanted to put my arm around her, but Horwood was there watching us. The garden chairs were empty, and I made for the weeping willow not far from the summer house, and I was aware of her keeping her distance. Not till we reached the bank did I pull the letter out of my pocket.

"Left with me by mistake. Perhaps you would like to read it down here -- in peace."

She took the letter from me, glanced at it, hesitated, and sat down on the river bank. I turned and strolled away a few yards, and looked up at the house. Horwood was leaning against one of the white pillars of the porch, watching me, and it occurred to me that he might be in a mood to demand that letter or take it from her by force. Well, I could counter that. I turned back and squatted a yard or two away from her. The letter was lying in her lap and she was staring wide-eyed at the water.

"Isolda ---- "

I saw her head turn quickly. Almost she looked distraught.

"Yes."

"If I make a suggestion, my dear, will it hurt you?"

"I don't know ----"

"Why not tear it up, and give the pieces to the river?"

I met her eyes for a moment. Then I saw her pick up the letter and envelope and tear them deliberately into pieces. She stood up, went close to the river and scattered those white fragments on the water. We both watched them float away. We were silent.

Then she turned. It seemed to me that the colour had come back into her face and that her eyes were full of what I should call assuagement. She was mute for a second or two, watching the pieces of white paper drift down stream.

"Thank you. I think I will go back now."

I saw Horwood change his posture as we walked up the grassy slope. He stood between the two white pillars and his legs a'straddle, his tummy thrust out, and I was reminded of that kingly cad, Henry the Eighth. I wanted to put a protective arm about Isolda. The idea of her having to re-enter that beastly house revolted me, and more than that I think -- for the first time -- I was afraid. I glanced at her questioningly.

"Feeling all right, my dear?"

She smiled, and her smile surprised me. She was head in air, and suddenly serene and jocund.

"Yes -- I am doing flowers. It's rather restful."

My eyes were now on Horwood as we neared the porch. I was going to see her in and more than that. I was waiting for him to move and break that menacing stance, and I had one or two things to say to him. And move he did, and let her pass and his eyes were on me and not upon her.

"Quite the chaperone -- Mr. Byron."

That gave me the very opening that I needed. I looked him in the face and no man could have missed my meaning.

"Miss Mallory and I happen to be -- friends, Mr. Horwood. I would like you to remember it."

"Smitten, my dear sir?"

"There are some things some men never understand. Shall we leave it at that."

I waited a moment for the possible reaction -- but all I got from him was a kind of belly chuckle.

II

I might have gone on a paper chase and collected some of those fragments which were floating down stream, but the river chose to play me one strange trick, perhaps because the River God had not found me greedy. When I went into the boat house next morning to get the skiff out, I saw a piece of paper floating beside the boat. I bent down and fished it out, and the writing was quite legible. I recognized it at once as being part of that letter which had come to her from Cornwall. I read it.

"Rita is ----"

So, the vagarities of the river flow had brought me a little label with her child's name upon it. Rita. I could draw no other conclusion. I turned it over and got just two words -- "the chickens" -- and I could not help laughing. Were the chickens laying well? And what was Rita? Also -- well? I laid that piece of paper on a shelf where it could dry, slipped the sculls into the rowlocks, got aboard and pushed out.

Inevitably I sculled up stream. I will admit that I had had a restless night, worrying about her, and it had taken me a couple of hours to find sleep. I was becoming quite jittery about her being in that home with him.

A woman's defence may hold up to a point, but if ---- Yes, I'll confess I could not put that beastliness into words, but just felt as though molten metal was scorching my interior. I drew level with the house and took an easy, and then I saw her at that upper window. I waved to her and she waved back and sanity seemed to come back into my world.

I eased the boat along at a lazy paddle, for I felt myself slipping into one of these dreamy moods when the creative urge is active within. I knew that phase so well. It was like laying awake at night in the soft darkness, listening and hearing nothing, and then -- in a flash, some idea would manifest, a picture in my mind, something that demanded expression in form and colour. One of my literary friends has told me that the same thing happens with him. And he had laughed. "A hot bath -- in my case -- seems to stimulate inspiration and sometimes I get the idea when I'm shaving." Well, I had that feeling as I sculled up-stream, that something was seething inside me, and that I had only to wait for it to emerge.

I sculled as far as Washers Wood, where the great trees, oaks and beeches had walked down to the river as though to wash their feet in it as to drink. I lay on my sculls and looked into the green glamour of that superb wood. It seemed as old as Time, and anything could happen here. A man with a long bow might have emerged in Lexicon green, or some Roman legionnaire in harness who had lost his way and had a thirst that needed quenching. I just sat and stared, and suddenly the inspiration came to me.

I would go down to St. Mawes and discover Rita. It should not be difficult in that small place. I would make friends with the child, and through the child I might come closer to the mother.

Morseley, that bright-eyed American, was a friend of mine. He kept two charming little hotels there on the water front. I would go back and ring him up and see if he could house me for a day or two.

III

The Abbotsbridge exchange is not the most forthcoming and responsive of places, but the young woman I contacted did put me in touch with the Ship & Castle at St. Mawes. I asked for Mr. Morseley and was told by the office that he was not in the hotel. Well, was Mrs. Morseley available?

"Who is speaking?" asked the voice.

"Mr. Robert Byron -- from Surrey."

"Hold on a moment, Mr. Byron."

I waited and then I heard the pleasant voice of Morseley's young Polish wife. She was a most kind and charming creature, with a small child of her own, and somehow her voice reminded me of Isolda's.

"Hello, Mr. Bryon."

"Hello -- Mrs. Morseley -- I think? -- Good -- I am motoring down west and I wondered if your husband could put me up for a few days."

"Oh, Mr. Byron -- we are full."

"No chance at all? It's rather urgent."

"Wait a moment. I'll speak to Miss Hartley. Hold on."

I waited and not for long.

"Are you there, Mr. Byron?"

"Yes."

"Would you be satisfied with a room -- out?"

"Quite."

"In one of the cottages. You could take your meals with us."

"Thank you greatly, Mrs. Morseley."

"What day?"

"Let's see -- this is Wednesday. I could be with you on Friday."

"Shall you want a car from Truro?"

"No -- I'll drive down -- I have been saving coupons. It will be

splendid to see you both."

"Then -- till Friday, Mr. Byron."

"Till Friday, and thank you so much."

Isolda's Diary

Shall I ever forget the morning he brought that letter to The Meadows ? Of course the beast -- that's how I think of him now -- had tried to get hold of it, but Robert seemed to dominate Horwood. The beast's bluff did not work.

Robert gave me the letter. We went and sat by the river and while I read the letter, he left me alone, but all the time I was wondering whether the letter had any particular meaning for him. If he had played the cad and pretended that he had opened it by mistake, he would have found out about Rita. And what then ?

Then he said something which surprised me. He had glanced back at the house and I glanced too. The Beast was standing there on the porch.

" Why not tear it up and give it to the river ? "

I looked at him, but he was gazing at the meadows across the way. This was the same suggestion of gentle restraint, generous comprehension. He might have known what that letter meant to me.

I did not say anything. I just tore it up, and scattered the pieces on the water. He put out a hand and I held it for a moment.

We went back to the house. The Beast blocked the way. He was looking dangerous, but again, my Robert dominated him. I slipped in, but I waited in the lounge to listen.

I shall never forget what he said to Harwood and he said it so quietly. You have been warned, Mr. Beast.

Oh -- joy and dread !

- 15 -

I wanted to let Isolda know that I should be away for a few days, and without Harwood being aware of my absence. It could be done by letter, but I had not much faith in any letter reaching her without being tampered with or perhaps stolen. I took Bill partly into my confidence. I told him where I was going, but with the information was to be kept under his hat, but that if any message comes from The Meadows, he was to phone me at St. Mawes. Bill was one of those quiet fellows who look you straight in the face, good English with natural manners, and a quiet integrity. I had an affection for him which I believe was returned for I don't think I have said that -- in a sense -- he owed his life to me. It had happened in the Normandy bocage when we were being mortared by the Germans. Bill had been hit while crawling forward to reconnoitre, and I had rescued him.

I don't know how much Bill had guessed, but he took my orders with utter seriousness. I gave him Morseley's telephone number.

" Bill."

" Yes, sir."

" I have good reasons for not liking that place over there."

" I should say so, sir."

" And I have a friend who is not too happy there."

He nodded at me, and gave me a smile of affection. He must have seen that portrait in the studio and it was more than possible that he had seen her.

" I'm trusting you, my lad. Where I shall be is nobody's business -- unless ---- "

" You can trust me, sir."

" I can, Bill -- and thanks, my lad."

" Thank -- you, sir."

I wanted to see her alone before I left and I was lucky. I had walked to

the main gates, trying to make up my mind about going across to The Meadows when I saw her in the lane. I guessed that she had been out to post a letter and I waved to her. She paused, gave one anxious glance at The Meadows gate and waited for me

I don't know why, but I got the impression that some of her aloofness had returned. She was head up, and her eyes seemed to appraise me. I suppose that many women whose experiences of the creature man have not been too happy, must suffer from fluctuating feelings towards some particular man. There were days -- perhaps -- when some primordial mistrust possessed her, and he might appear as a menace or a nuisance. But her sudden remote chillness hurt me. Had she been thinking twice about that misdirected letter and my motives ?

I said, " I shall be away for a few days. I wanted to tell you that if ---- "

And then I hesitated, for -- almost she looked at me as she had looked at me that wet day in June.

" Yes ---- "

That one questioning word was a challenge. It was like one of Angelo's thrusts, or a straight right from Jimmy Slaughter and somehow I could not parry it.

I made myself smile at her.

" Sorry -- am I being -- presumptuous ? "

She turned towards the gate.

" Perhaps -- but, well -- men can assume so much."

She did not look at me again, nor did I attempt to follow her. Damn it -- had I ever met a woman who could be more difficult and incalculable ? I had begun to believe that she had ceased to class me with the " Meadows " crowd and that I had some solid meaning for her as man. I strolled back to Hurtfield, puzzled and a little exasperated, and then my bitter mood passed. Maybe some more subtle comprehension came to me. Would any easy

and consenting wench have made me feel as I felt about her ? And she had had much to bear, poor dear, and still had much to bear.

I suppose -- like many craftsman whose craft comes to them with a kind of gracious ease -- I was a somewhat simple soul and not a subject for self-analysis, nor an interpreter of the waywardness of the human psyche. Healthy is as healthy does, and there was no unpleasant and fetid corners in myself or so I believed. I found life good and the expressing of it somewhat good. I suppose a psycho-analyst could have astonished me about my inward self and the bitter whimsies of woman. Maybe she is much more defenceless and more vulnerable than man, and that the phases of the moon might express her changefulness.

Was I to give up the adventure ? No, I would not. My car was ready and I would go in that strange quest that had a flavour of romance for me. I was sitting in the old parlour, with the light fading and the colour melting out of the familiar things about me. All was brown or grey, a little world that would find a soft sensation in sleep. My mood was whimsical and sad, and -- perhaps for the first time in my life -- I was conscious of loneliness. Then, I heard a faint sound of footsteps somewhere outside the house, a sound that came and went like a wayward stirring of leaves in the stillness of the night. No bell rang and yet I found that I had heard yet another sound.

I got up and went out into the hall. It was very dark here, but I could distinguish something white lying on the oak floor.

A letter.

It had floated like a leaf and came to rest beyond the mat. I bent down and picked it up, carried it into the parlour, and turned on the light. There was no name on the envelope.

I slit it open, drew out a sheet and read.

Forgive me

Yes, just that !

II

I had a long drive before me, and I was away by seven o'clock, with the sun at my back and the roads tolerably empty. Bill had serviced the car, a 20 H.P. Rover. She was old but she was fast and never had I had any trouble with her, and I always thought of her as a young car, which as to mileage she was. I had a spare tin of petrol in the locker and a wad of coupons in my wallet and like Mr. Dalton, a song in my heart, though I would call my melody more actual than his. What a fantastic adventure was this, the quest of the illegitimate child of the woman who expressed for me -- finality.

I was making for Basingstoke and Andover, and I got through most of the shopping centres before what I called the Round House Hour. The car was running well, and seemed to be as much for the adventure as I was. I pushed her along at fifty on the open road and met very little traffic and I was feeling good with those two words of hers singing in me.

It was somewhere near Stonehenge that I rushed a hill, dropping to third half-way up it, and I was near the top when a flurry of brownish water gushed out round the radiator cap. I pulled up, got out put my hand to the cap and swore, for the thing was too hot to be touched. She was boiling.

I said, " Well, you are a beauty to play such a trick on a day like this."

I let her cool own, and then eased her along till I came to a lonely cottage. A woman gave me a can of water, and I filled the car up, and drove on more docilely. But she was in ill humour. Almost she might have been

jabbing at the journey and trying to persuade me to abandon it. She took to misfiring on hills and squirting more rusty water from her radiator and I began to realize that I had no chance of making St. Mawes in a day. So I decided to break the journey at Taunton, and phone the Morseleys and tell them I should be delayed. We did reach Taunton late in the afternoon. "The Castle" could put me up, and I left my luggage and drove the car to a garage.

An overworked and rather casual foreman listened to my troubles. He said that the ignition might need adjusting and he would have a look at the carburetor and valve timing and fill her up with clean water. I was not wholly reassured, but hopeful, though I had begun to suspect that it was not the car's fault. Her cooling system might be rusted up, for she had been packed up during the war.

I shall always laugh -- a little sardonically -- over a piece of forethought that saved the situation. The car was delivered to me next morning, plus the bill and an assurance that all was well. I often wonder whether they did anything to the machine. I happened to stroll into The Castle garage, and I saw an empty gin bottle in a corner. I collected that bottle, filled it at a tap and stowed it away, well couched in the locker.

How I was to bless that bottle! I have kept it as a friendly memento of that devilish drive. I had not covered twenty miles before she began to vomit, and in a lonely stretch of road. I let her cool and then emptied the contents of the bottle into her. It occurred to me that I had better refill that bottle and after looking around, I found a small pool half full of very dirty water. Well, the lady would have to be satisfied with a very dirty drink,

And what a day of it I had, with the damned radiator vomiting at the top of every considerable hill, and I -- scouting around with that bottle or stopping at cottages or farms. I dared not push her beyond twenty miles an

hour and I spent the day with my eyes glued to the damned nose. But I reached St. Mawes in the evening, having chucked the ferry, and taken the more round-about way. I was tired and exasperated.

III

I had not been out of the car three minutes before the limpid loveliness of this little Cornish place had seeped into me. My luggage had been carried off by a burly porter, who promised to run the car to the local garage and tell them what the trouble was. I felt I did not want to see the car again for at least a week. The tide was in, the water very blue and sleek, and the great hills green and glowing. Boats lay moored everywhere. I strolled to the end of the harbour, and looked at the parade of little homes, so intimate and individual and right, with their gardens glowing, and their eyes full of the evening sunlight. What a picture the place was, and sudden peace came to me.

Then I saw Morseley on the steps of the "Ship and Castle", a friendly and familiar figure against the white wall. He had spotted me and he waved, and came to meet me. I remembered how the first time I had met him, I had liked him, his bright eyes and his American vivacity.

"Hope, I haven't put you out, Morseley?"

"Some people never put one out -- What happened?"

"My damned car took to vomiting."

He laughed.

"Diner indicated. Your room is all ready. It's just up the hill behind."

"Great! I could do with a drink."

"Come along into the bar."

I had my drink, and then dinner and what a dinner in these derelict days! The chef was a Pole, and the waiter Italian. I ordered half a bottle of

oldish Chateau Lafitte, and the glamour of it all grew upon me. I had a table in the big bay and the place was like the poop of a ship with all the colour of sea and sky and hills so near and so untarnished. Moreover, St. Mawes was just St. Mawes at this time of the day, for char-a-banc invaders had departed, and no fat women with flat faces and naked purple legs mucked about gaping at anything that was not Bristol or Birmingham.

I took my coffee on the big balcony above the dining room, and Morseley joined me. I lit my pipe. We had the place to ourselves, for most of the residents had gone upon an evening stroll now that St. Mawes was Cornish and not mass produced Midlands. The land-locked water and Falmoth Roads and the sleek green hills were extraordinarily brilliant, and almost surreal in the suggestion of romance. I remembered that I was in the lead of Tristan and Isolda.

I said, "You chose pretty well, Morseley."

But his brown face was serious.

"Sure -- I did, but choosing isn't everything in this sweet country of yours. And you are trying to tackle problems with one hand tied behind your back."

"Yes, living by regulations. It must be pretty exasperating to a man from over yonder."

His eyes lit up as though the scene before us was sufficient.

"Let's forget it."

"Yes," said I, "There is virtue in forgetting anaemic buns and meat tied up with string. And this sea is free to all. Fishermen and farm labourers know something of reality."

He chuckled.

"And -- hoteliers ! -- If you had a month of my job, Byron, you might run wild like a mad Norseman."

"I dare say I should."

IV

But I was tired and ready for unpacking and bed, and the hefty porter who was still on duty acted as my guide. We took the steep lane between mysterious little houses behind the hotel, and climbed. We were in the shadow, but as we climbed we came into the slanting light of the setting sun. I saw two white cottages with little gardens in front of them, easy little places. The nearest one was mine.

“Yours, sir.”

He knocked, and a pleasant old body opened the door.

I raised my hat to her.

“I’m afraid I’m rather late.”

“Your room’s all ready, sir.”

My room was upstairs and at the back, simple and clean, with a window looking east. I put my suitcase on the bed, and was opening it when I heard a woman’s voice coming from the garden next door.

“Rita -- my pet -- time for bed.”

I went to the window and saw a small girl with honey coloured hair running up the path.

“Well, I’m damned ! ” thought I, “ Are things going to be so easy ? ”

The bed was more comfortable than I had expected it to be, and I lay relaxed, with my hands under my head, and wondered. What a strange string of coincidences had brought me to this Cornish cottage ! Waiting for a train at a station, Horwood's development of The Meadows, a mis-delivered letter, a piece of torn paper drifting into my boathouse.

And here I was next door to her child. In fact the child might be in the room corresponding to mine next door, with nothing but a inner wall between us. It did not occur to me that St. Mawes might contain two Ritas. The coincidence was too convincing.

After that devil of a drive and Morseley's dinner and the good wine, I slept the sleep of the unjust, for I have always suspected that the righteous are lighter sleepers than the sinners. There may have been excitement in me, but it failed to keep me awake, though I woke with it very much active in me next morning.

Early sunlight on the blind, and the austere little room very peaceful. I heard the creaking of the stairs, and a gentle knock at my door.

"Your shaving water, sir."

"Thank you."

"Would you like a cup of tea, sir ? "

"I should -- very much so -- Won't it run you short ? "

"I can manage, sir."

Shaving water, a cup of tea, and gentle manners ! How simple and reassuring. I had a feeling that the day was going to be good.

My first contact with her child was to be immediate and surprising. Breakfast at the Ship and Castle. I opened the cottage door, and saw a small girl leaning on the next door gate. She was in a blue frock and her hair was honey, and her little legs well browned. Her back was turned to

me.

I said, " Good morning, Rita."

She turned about. I saw a little freckled face, a piquant little face. Her eyes were hazel like her mother's, lucid and strangely fearless. I don't think I had ever seen a more fresh and attractive little face, with its slightly retroussé nose and its mischievous freckles. She looked at me solemnly for a moment and then broke into a smile.

" How do you know I'm Rita ? "

" I heard someone call you Rita."

She stood looking up at me with the engaging candour of some small girl, and the extraordinary thing was she had a small dignity of her over which I found vastly attractive.

" What's your name ? "

" Robert. I am just going down to the hotel for my breakfast."

" I've had mine. What are you doing here ? "

" Having a holiday."

And then the next door opened and a little dark woman appeared. She was one of those women with a smiling vitality, and her eyes were kind.

I said, " Rita and I have been having a gossip."

She gave me an appraising look which became friendly.

" Rita's a bit of mischief, sir."

" And she's pretty, aren't you Rita."

The child was looking up at me with little twinkling eyes.

" So mother says -- I think I am."

I and Mrs. Next Door exchanged laughing looks.

" Is she -- yours, madam ? "

I saw the woman's face go serious and sad.

" No, sir ; she just lives with us. I lost my only one."

" I'm sorry. Well, Rita, I must have my breakfast. We'll see each other

again.”

I raised my hat to her guardian, and passed out and down the steep little street, and suddenly I heard the child's voice.

“ Goodbye, Mr. Robert.”

I turned and waved to her, and saw her holding the childless woman's hand.

II

The dining room of the Ship and Castle was fairly full, but my table was waiting for me. I saw the Morseleys at a corner table at the back of the room, and turned to greet them. His wife, with her comely face and blond hair, was as pleasant to behold as this summer morning.

“ Good morning, Byron. How was the bed ? ”

“ Good all through. Not like the curate's eggs.”

“ My wife was sure that you would be comfortable there.”

“ Thank you, Mrs. Morseley. Old bachelors can be funny people.”

She gave me that kind smile of hers.

“ Are you -- Mr. Byron ? ”

“ No need -- here.”

As I walked to my table I was conscious of being observed. Robert Byron, the painter of portraits. Is any man displeased when the world shows interest in him ?

The “ Ship and Castle ” collected pleasant people -- those who the saying is -- messed about in boats, people who just wanted to rest and be lazy, or were capable of absorbing the colour and reassuring simplicity of this tiny township. There was the familiar sound which I always described as the beating heart of St. Mawes, the chug-chug of the “ St. Gerrans ” lying at the quay and about to make one of her many daily passages to Falmouth.

Boats of all descriptions were very much alive, like some ancient and cheerful community which understood the courtesy of the sea. Footsteps, voices and a few cars passed to and fro below.

My neighbours at the next table were an elderly couple who belonged to a world that was dying, if not dead. The wife had pretty white hair and a tired face. The husband was one of those quietly cheerful people who in their particular English way -- can shrug off vexative problems and even chuckle over Mr. Shinwell or Mr. Bevan. I caught him glancing at my tie. He could be tolerant even about ties. His education had been lengthy and complete.

He spoke to me.

"Your first, visit, Mr. Byron?"

"No, sir -- I have been here pretty often."

"Plenty of colour for you, I suppose."

"Yes, and studies of extemporary customs and manners."

He chuckled.

"Or -- the lack of them. At eight a.m., St. Mawes is just St. Mawes, and courteous. At eleven or so it may become char-a-banc. My wife uses a certain antiquated article called a parasol. It produces strange giggles in the contemporary young. At six or so p.m., St. Mawes becomes itself again -- the sea -- and men who go down to the sea in ships. Our new aristocracy has departed."

I laughed.

"A study in legs, sir, ice cornets and beer."

"Exactly."

His lady was observing me. I had noticed her hands, slightly deformed by rheumatism, and work worn. I suppose Mr. Bevan would have gloated over those hands, and felt more the Minister of Humiliation than of Health.

She said, "My husband is much kinder than he sounds."

He gave her a look of affection.

"Let's call it benign expression. Most of these people are good people, if a little crude. If you fell into the sea and couldn't swim, some chap would take a risk and try to pull you out."

I nodded at him.

"True, sir. One found that out in the war. I suppose they are enjoying being -- it."

"But are they, Mr. Byron?"

"Well, I'm not sure."

"Just what they are suffering from, like a dustman wearing a topper for the first time, and feeling a bit strange in it?"

I laughed. I was to be lucky in my neighbours. I was to discover that Sir Stephen Grandison had spent many years as an administrator in the East and had returned to a small villa in Surrey, and had become the inevitable washer-up. They owned a little old car which his wife drove, and I was to be impressed by the essential humour and humility of this somewhat distinguished man.

I was remembering my own car, and when I had filled a pipe, I strolled along to the garage, and made contact with my friend Joe. He had a flair for cars and their ailments, and physically he might have been Noel Cowards' younger brother, and the extraordinary thing was that they shared the same birthday. Joe was busy on the Rover, dismantling the radiator, and he grinned at me.

"Hello, sir."

"Found the trouble, Joe?"

"She's rusted up. No wonder, you had a day of it."

"Can you put her right?"

"It will take a day or two, sir. I shall have to fill her up with rust-remover."

" Well, I'll leave her to you, Joe. How's the family ? "

" Fine, sir."

I went and sat on the sea-wall, smoked my pipe and watched life. One or two of the locals recognized me, and came and chatted. I liked these Cornish men of the sea. If you gave them courtesy you got a natural courtesy in return. There seemed to be no spite or class-consciousness in them. They had their sea.

I was talking to Peter Payelly who owned a motor-launch, and had often taken me to St. Gerrans, or up the Fal or across to the Helford River. His pipe was empty and I offered him a fill. He was Cornish of the Cornish, dark and lean and reticent if you were not to his liking, and I could have pictured him sailing with Tristan and Isolda in the days of King Mark of Cornwall. He was in one of his sombre moods, and I wondered why, for he and I had always been easy with each other. He filled his pipe and lit it, looking as solemn as a man who had some religious question worrying him. He blew out the match, watched its little sliver of smoke, and then dropped it over the wall into the sea. Then I saw his head turn and his whole face changed and came alive. A woman and a small girl were coming down the steps by the " Ship and Castle " -- Rita and the woman she lodged with.

" Hello -- my next door neighbours."

" That's my wife, Mr. Byron."

So, the next door cottage was Payelly's and he -- a kind of foster father to Isolda's child. I remembered his wife's stricken face when she had confessed to being motherless, and I wondered if it was the childlessness that troubled Payelly.

I said, " Your wife and Rita and I introduced ourselves this morning. She's a charming little thing."

Payelly was waving to them, and the child, letting go of Mrs. Payelly's hand, came running down to us. She came straight to Peter, who picked her

up and placed her on his knee. His whole lean face was lit up and he stroked her long honey coloured hair. Such were contrasts in colouring between man and child that I could understand the little thing's allure. Mrs. Payelly, shopping basket in hand, passed on, and I had thought the smile she gave as very wistful.

"Well, Miss Rita," said I, "You seem a popular young lady."

She crinkled up her nose at me.

"I like your coat and I like your tie."

"Splendid."

"I like your skirt."

"And what about my miserable face?"

Payelly chuckled and rocked her up and down.

"What do you say to that, young woman?"

"I think he's very handsome."

She sucked a finger and looked coy.

"Well, well," said I, "For that -- I think I ought to salute the lady. May -- I, Rita?"

Payelly laughed and held her up to me, and we exchanged a most satisfying kiss. Two lads in blue jersey's and sea-boots -- who were passing, grinned at me.

"You're in favour, Mr. Byron."

"So it seems," said I.

But Rita slipped off Payelly's knees, and with an arch look at both of us, ran off to rejoin Mrs. Payelly, and Peter watched her with those dark eyes of his.

"Sweet ration, I guess, sir."

"Sweets to the sweet, Peter. I must hand over my sweet coupons. Is she a niece of yours?"

I was a little ashamed of that dishonest question, and I saw his eyes

darken.

"No, -- Mr. Byron. Wish she was. She's got a mother working somewhere near London."

"You are kind of foster parents."

He nodded.

"What's her other name, Peter?"

"Mallory, sir."

And suddenly he grew reticent and almost gruff, and in my wisdom, I asked no more questions.

III

Yes, a nice discretion was needed even in my approach to the child. I did not want the Payellys to suspect that Rita was my whole reason for being in St. Mawes, and to make the visit appear more natural, I had brought some painting gear with me. I was a little unsure of certain things, and I walked up to the castle and lay on the grass and let myself relax between sea and sky. I don't know how the idea came to me. Does one know how ideas come, any more than one can explain how the dead and strangers that one has never seen manifest in dreams. I was lying there in the sun and staring at the sky when a voice said to me -- "Paint the child's portrait."

So challenging was the suggestion that I sat up like one who has been startled into wakefulness. Paint her portrait? And take it back with me? And what ulterior purpose might that picture of a small girl serve? I had no notion at the moment, nothing but the idea that had come so suddenly into my head.

I collected my ration book and paid a visit to the shop above the quay which was St. Mawe's John Barker or Harrods, and like many shops of its kind, it sometimes had more to offer you than the London Stores. It

proposed for me wrapped Fruit Creams and Parkinson's Butter Drops. I chose the Parkinson's product and took my month's ration and slipped the bag into my pocket.

It was becoming the char-a-banc hour, four motor-coaches were parked on the quay, and the " St. Gerrans " had spilled yet another libation at our feet. Curious -- how the English -- when upon holiday -- appear to find other places and other people ludicrous and mirth-making. I met two old acquaintances outside the shop, and I will admit that they were somewhat unique in their décor, the more so perhaps because both were white-headed. They had their pet Cairn with them and as we chatted by the sea wall, the passing trippers gave us irreverent smirks. I realized how much more dignified was the dog. He sat quietly on his haunches and ignored the crowd. It did not seem to exist for him.

" Doing any painting, Mr. Byron ? "

" I have something in mind. "

The old gentleman was head in air. He had a fierce and a fiery face and he made me think of Julius Caesar confronting an Egyptian mob. Two louts and two young ladies had just passed us and they turned to stare and giggle.

" The daily invasion," said I. " They don't seem to teach these poor things manners."

Youth heard me, and became suddenly vocal and impudent.

" We're workers, we are."

The lad had a raucous voice, and I patted the dog's head, and smiled at indignant youth.

" Don't be silly, my lad."

I have always found that particular remark exceedingly effective.

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I knocked at the Payelly door, with the bag of sweets in my other hand, and it was the child who opened the door to me.

"Hello, Rita -- I have some sweets here."

She gave me a captivating upward smile.

"Do you like sweets?"

Did she like sweets! I opened the bag and she dipped her fingers into it.

"Thank you Mr. Robert."

"You can have the bag, Rita."

"I mustn't be greedy, must I?"

Well, well -- out of the mouth of babes and sucklings! I was beginning to realize that she was the daughter of her mother and her small, luminous, clean little face made me understand Peter Payelly's affections for her. This small girl had manners and dignity and convincingly so after the New Model jeerers there by the quay.

Then, Mrs. Payelly appeared with her hands smothered in flour, and I made my request to her.

"I have brought Rita my sweet ration, Mrs. Payelly."

"How kind of you, sir."

"I have a favour to ask -- you know I paint pictures."

"We all know that, sir."

"I would like to paint Rita's portrait. Any objection?"

"Why, no, sir -- I'm sure ----"

We both looked at the child who was obviously with sweet.'

"What do you think of that, Rita? You'll be quite famous."

"Will it be a picture?"

I laughed.

"Very much so, I hope."

I painted that portrait in the Payelly garden, with Rita posed on an old milking stool, and with the white cottage and its climbing roses for a background. For a child, and a very live and vivacious little creature, she was a good sitter, and she chattered away to me, which did not matter. I prefer a live face to a dead one, but every now and again she would jump up and come and stand beside me to look at the result of my labours. She did this very solemnly, her hands clasped in front of her and her honey head held high.

“ Is that really me, Mr. Robert.”

“ It’s as I see you, Rita.”

“ Have I got all those freckles ? ”

I chuckled.

“ Do you like them ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ I’ll leave out the freckles, if you like.”

And then she said something which gave me furiously to think.

“ I wonder if mummy will like it.”

That question pondered me considerably. Had I foreseen all the possibilities ? Mrs. Payelly might be writing one of her weekly letters, and I -- should be news. Oh, inevitably and most problematically so. The famous Mr. Robert Byron was painting Rita’s portrait. Did I want her to know yet that I had followed the clue that a fragment of torn paper had given me ? How would she take it, for she was still incalculable to me, and was somehow the one woman who could make me afraid. And I was sufficiently old fashioned to believe that when a man could fear the love that was in him, that love was not a mere thing of the flesh.

Could I take the Payelly’s into my confidence ? And did Rita write letters ?

I said, “ Back on the stool, little lady.”

She went and sat on the stool, and then she asked one of those questions which spifflicate mere man.

“ Why are you frowning, Mr. Robert ? ”

“ Frowning. Am I -- well, this is a very serious business, Rita.”

It was.

II

Just how much did the Payellys know ? I let the child chatter to me, and now and again I allowed her off the stool and encouraged the sucking of a sweet, and she even did this with a kind of childish dignity. She seemed quite without fear or any of the complicated reactions which arrive with the exaltation of the ego. In fact, she was unpretentious personified, and I began to realize that the child might mean about as much to me as the mother.

I was still at work when Payelly came up the hill for his dinner, and when I glanced at this face, I got the impression that he was not pleased. Maybe Rita had begun to mean so much to him that this dark Cornishman could be jealous.

“ Hello, Peter. -- I’m doing Rita’s portrait.”

Which was obvious. He pushed the gate open rather roughly with his foot, and stared hard at my work. I stood up, and smiled at him.

“ I think Rita has had enough for one morning. Here’s an idea, Peter. Why shouldn’t I do a family group -- the three of you ? ”

He face lost its hardness. He picked up the child and kissed her.

“ What do you say to that, you bit of mischief ? ”

Rita crinkled up her freckled nose at me over his shoulder.

“ I could sit on Uncle’s lap, couldn’t I ”

Payelly chuckled and kissed her on the forehead.

"Tell you one thing, sir."

"What's that, Peter?"

"The lads are going to have a bothersome time of it someday."

III

So, Rita's portrait was finished, and I was pleased with it, and talked to the Payellys of exhibiting it in London. Then, in the evenings I got the family to pose for me, Rita on Payelly's knee, and I told them the picture was to be a present. Mrs. Payelly seemed quite excited and happy about it; she had proposed sitting for me in her Sunday frock, but I told her I preferred her working frock and apron.

"Your wife is a looker enough, Peter, without dressing the part."

I caught him looking at her in a particular way. She seemed to be lit up of a sudden, and more brightly coloured and I thought, "Why can't these good people have what they long for?"

It was my fourth day at St. Mawes, and Joe had got the Rover into shape. He had given her a tough testing up the Cornish hills, and there was no more over-heating. I was still wondering whether the news of my being at St. Mawes had reached The Meadows. I was troubled about it, for I did not want her to know until I was back at Hurtfield.

I came out of my cottage on my way to breakfast, and I found Peter Payelly at his garden gate. He was smoking a pipe and his face had a curious swarthy serenity. He turned and touched his cap to me.

"Doing anything this morning, sir?"

"Nothing fixed, Peter."

"Well, you come out in my boat, yes -- up to St. Gerrans. We'll take the child."

"I'd love to, Peter."

“ And no charge, sir.”

I got the impression that he was very happy about something, and his eyes met mine as though he was cherishing a pleasant joke. He said that he would have his boat at the quay by ten o'clock, if that would suit me. I said it would. I went down to my breakfast, wondering whether my impression had some valid meaning, and just why Payelly's face had lost its over-shadowed look.

It was a perfect morning, and we set off at ten, Rita on my knees, Peter at the controls. His boat was painted a soft blue and she seemed part of the sea and he did not drive her hard but let her chug placidly over the still water. He had taken his cap off, and his black hair had a sheen, and so had his face. The child sat quietly on my knees and was happily silent.

The hills and wood slid by under a cloudless sky, past the new white villas in the hills. Almost I could forgive those villas for being there on this summer morning. Payelly was smoking his pipe, and I gave Rita and occasional tickle, and she wiggled and laughed at me. What a simple occasion was this, yet how profoundly satisfying. I was thinking of the “ Meadows ” world, and the silly futilities of much that was modern. Boredom, and a blindness, no joy and fun in its music, no melody, fat men crooning of love with obese dreamers, tales that were mostly lust and murder or highbrow grouching and liverish spite. I felt that the child on my knees was so much more right and real, a creature of wholesome health who had not been debauched by too many toys. And had her mother, with the supreme wisdom of one who had suffered, planned to keep her so, like a wild flower on a wayside bank.

We were running up towards St. Gerrans when Payelly took his pipe out of his mouth.

“ Got a bit of news, sir.”

“ Have you, Peter ? ”

Was I to hear that my secret had been revealed. I saw that he was smiling all over his face.

“ Yes, -- you’ve brought us luck. Mary told me something this morning.”

He poked his pipe at me and grinned.

“ Maybe -- it will be a girl if all goes right.”

I put out my hand and he gripped it.

“ That’s great news, Peter.”

“ Yes, God bless her. She’s been keeping it a secret until she was sure.”

Then Rita wiggled round, and looked up at me.

“ What’s Uncle mean, Mr. Robert ? ”

“ Never you mind,” said I. “ Tell you what though, young lady, I think I’ll go over to Falmouth and buy you a doll.”

IV

I took the car out that afternoon and drove to Falmouth by way of the King Harry Ferry. The Rover behaved sweetly, but I did not find Falmouth sweet. I had known it mostly where out of season when it had been somewhat itself, and not yet another mad-house for the millions. I managed to park the car in the square, but when it came to using one’s legs in the main street, one was made to think of a football crowd pouring out of football grounds. I will confess that I have a temperamental dislike of being crowded out and jostled, and I have often wondered at the insensitiveness of the ordinary man and woman. One can only suppose that they are so accustomed to milling in the millions that they become insensitive to such close contacts, like a flock of sheep bundling through a gate.

I bought a doll for Rita, a pipe, and some tobacco for Payelly, and a leather handbag for his wife. I was glad to get back into the car and escape, and as I had plenty of time, I drove by way of Malpas - Romances “

Mal Passage." Almost, Isolda was with me, and I found myself wondering what kind of fellow King Mark had been. Veritable Horwood, fooled by a cup of wine with its love poison or a somewhat pathetic person cheated by life and inevitable youth.

I was to find St. Mawes a Falmouth in miniature. The invasion was the worst I had experienced, and a motor-coach was blocking the lane leading up to the hotel garage. It was a perilous ascent at all times, with dustbins on one side of you, and a scattering of prams on the other. You prayed to God that you might hit a dustbin and miss a pram.

The driver of the coach was not to be seen, and he may have been having tea or an ale at the chalet by the quay, so there was nothing to be done about it for the moment and I parked the car on the slope to the east of the "Ship & Castle." I could put her away when St. Mawes became once more a place of peace. I climbed the white steps to the hotel and glanced at the table in the hall where visitor's letters were laid out. There was one for me, and I recognised Bill's boyish handwriting.

I took that letter in to the lower lounge. I am one of these peculiar people who have feelings about letters, especially those which may contain sinister news or originate from sinister people, and I had that feeling about Bill's letter. I opened it and read.

Dear Sir -

A lady called here today, the one who works at The Meadows. She asked when you would be back.

I told her I did not know.

Yours respectfully,

Bill

P.S. The lady seemed worried.

I sat for half a minute staring at Bill's letter. Then I folded it up and put it away in my breast pocket and went out to the car. I drove her to Joe's garage and found Joe. I told him I should be leaving early in the morning, and I asked him to look her over as to oil and tyre pressures. Also, I would get them to garage her for the night so that I could pull out without delay, for the Ship & Castle garage was apt to provide one with a problem in jams. I took the presents and climbed the lane to my cottage, and told the good lady that I should be leaving next morning.

I found the Payellys at tea, and Rita had her doll. She cuddled it with the tenderness of a young mother.

"Off tomorrow -- early, Peter."

Payelly was rubbing the bowl of the pipe I had bought him, and his wife was smiling over her bag.

"Sorry for that, sir."

"Oh, well, -- I may be down again."

Rita's face was upturned to me.

"Do come again soon, Mr. Robert."

I left them at the tea-table and went down to warn the hotel that I should be leaving early and could I have my bill by eight o'clock. I was thinking of my suggestive ramble round "Mal Passage."

Isolda's Diary

I wish Robert had not gone away just now. When will he be back ?

I'm frightened. The beast tried my door last night.

I said, " If you force that door, I'll throw myself out of the window."

I should have fought him like a wild cat, and some of the staff are sleeping near. They would have heard my screams, and they are not loving Horwood.

But how filthy and primitive it all is. I might be in the Russian zone of Vienna.

He is drinking like a fish, partly -- I suspect -- because the Club is not doing well. We started with a bang and then fizzled. The Dane Band has walked out on him. I suppose all this makes an evil creature even more evil.

What a simpleton I have become !

I wish Robert had not gone away just now. I have been over to Hurtfield to ask when he will be back.

I must tell him the truth, I must tell him. It is cowardly and wrong to go on like this.

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The car was her sleek and sweet self again and all that day I pushed her to the limit. It was no scenic drive so far as I was concerned, and I do not remember being conscious of the country through which I passed. A hill was just a hill to be rushed and a village an obstruction to be cursed and conquered. I admit that I took risks which I should not have taken on a normal drive, and that once or twice I played the road hog and must have caused other folk to curse me. I might have been back in the war and taking my Company into an attack and I suppose that those years of tense furiousness and of fear have left the skin of one's soul more thin and brittle. There is a ruthlessness in war that remains with us like a hang-over, and I was feeling ruthless and capable of killing. Had Harwood played the brute to her, or threatened her with some suborning beastliness ? That thought was with me all through that long drive and if the car ran sweetly there was no sweetness in me.

I did give myself half an hour for a quick lunch, and I believe it was at Honiton, but I made such good going that I passed Basingstoke late in the afternoon. Another forty miles or so and I should be home, and what sort of home-coming would be mine ? I did not touch my tobacco pouch and pipe all day, though in sticky patches during the war, I had smoked like a chimney.

I had left good weather behind me in Cornwall, but the familiar Surrey scenes had a grey melancholy, with a clouded sky and no sunlight and the suggestion of a northeast wind. Was it an omen ? And I had little Rita's portrait carefully wrapped up on the back seat, and on Rita's face was the beginning of a smile, the kind of smile I would wish on her mother's face. What had happened ? Had anything happened ? Strange how one can feel gentle to one particular creature while willing murder to another !

I had wired Bill from St. Mawes, and when I came to my own gates I found

them open for me. I drove in, pulled up and sat for a moment looking at the scene which I loved so well, the meadows and the river, the old home, the cedar. I could just see "Merlin" over yonder, and the tree's slanting spire was like a great hand stretched out in a blessing. Thank God for some green and peaceful corner such as this. And was it to be peace - or violence?

Bill had heard the car, and he came out to me with a look that I welcomed on his faithful face. Believe all the scepticism if you please, but life still as its loyalties.

"Had a good drive, sir?"

I was studying his face. There seemed to be no north-east wind in William.

"I've been hopping it, Bill. Any news?"

"No, sir," and it seemed to me that his eyes avoided mine.

I was conscious of relief, or was it deflation?

He took my luggage from the car, but I collected the child's portrait, and leaving Bill to put the car away, I carried the picture straight to the studio and stood it wrapped up on the easel. Had all my speed and fury been superfluous? I had walked straight into the studio and when I turned about, I saw her in a chair behind the door.

"Isolda!"

She gave me a kind of flinching look, her lashes flickering, her hands locked together in her lap. I stood quite still. A brittle, wincing smile softened her face.

"I heard you were coming back today."

I wanted to take those locked hands of hers and kiss them, but as I had felt many times before, I divined in her resistance, a "Please don't touch me" look.

I said, "Then this makes home-coming good. Have things been good with

you ? ”

Her lashes dropped and she looked down at her hands.

“ Oh, yes -- I manage.”

Now, just what did she mean ? I turned, collected a stool, and sat down opposite her.

“ May I say something to you ? ”

She gave me a quick frightened look.

“ I don't know -- I ---- ”

“ Look,” said I, leaning forward, “ there are some things I can stomach, others -- that make me feel murderous. You came here while I was away.”

“ Yes, -- I ---- ”

“ My dear, it seems to take a long time for me to make you realise that I'm not quite the casual cad.”

This time her eyes met mine.

“ Must I tell you -- that I think I know that ? Be patient with me.”

For a moment, she looked at me with strange steadfastness and I could see the child in her. Patient ? What if she knew of the secret my easel held ? And then I think sudden comprehension came to me. A secret, her secret !

She was afraid of what she might have to tell me, and her fear meant ---- Yes, I think I understood. It mattered to her, and a surge of tenderness swept over me.

I said, “ My dear, I have seen something of life, I'm no saint, save perhaps -- in my feeling for you. Think of that -- always. I will be patient.”

She stood up, and her face was luminous.

“ You are a good man, Robert. Thank you for that -- It helps me ---- ”

She put out a hand, and I bent and kissed it.

“ I must be going now.”

I went with her to the main gates. Bill and the car had gone and we were alone together, and I was hating the idea of her going back to that house. I

opened one of the gates for her.

"Let me see you in."

She looked frightened.

"Please, no. I can manage."

In fact she almost ran from me, and I was left standing there and posed by a double problem. Had she come to tell me the truth about the child, and found that she could not do it -- or not, yet? And were my reactions so important to her that she was afraid? There was deep and loving laughter in me. Poor darling! If she had known what I had brought back with me? And then I found myself regarding the other and sinister side of the picture. He knew. And was he persecuting her, trying to persuade her that unless she humoured him ----? I felt all my muscles go hard. Assuredly, if that was so, then the time was ripe for me to take a hand.

Yes, but how delicately must the part be played. If I was to persuade her to come again to the studio, and I uncovered that picture to her ----?

Then -- I remembered that other picture. She had not seen it yet, for I had put it away before going to St. Mawes. I could forget the portrait I had painted from memory, and try to persuade her to let me paint -- the reality.

Yes -- why not? I think I realised now how fragile a flower was her faith in man, and to those who are mere crude modernists. I suppose such sensitive ideas would have appeared either ridiculous or mere feline allure. All women played up to men, and most women preferred potent cads.

Damn all such shallow incertitude. I had got to wash all fear from her face.

II

The next day was a Saturday and I was becoming curious about the

economics of The Meadows. I cannot claim to emulate one of those excellent "Leaders" in "The Times" wherein some expert puts another expert into portentous prose, and leaves you wondering at the end whether you have any recollection of the first paragraph. My expertise is in eyes and hands, and at school I was a bored duffer.

Firstly, I was not regarding The Meadows as a permanency, a miniature and much more septic Monte Carlo on my door step. I wanted the place and all that it symbolised removed, for certainly I would have preferred it as a Victorian home for cats.

I sounded Bill on the subject. What sort of week had they enjoyed?

"Pretty quiet, sir."

"Observation or interior information, Bill?"

"Well, sir. I have run into the chef at the pub. He's a Pole, but not a bad bloke. The staff is rather fed up."

"Oh -- tips down?"

"Well, sir, -- the bastard who runs it -- excuse me, sir."

"No apology is needed, Bill. You can call the gentleman what you please."

"He's mean and a bully, and I gather the show's not going on as he thought it would."

"Good news, my lad. You and I have been through the rough together, and the one thing that makes an ex-serviceman want to vomit is that sort of show. The cads, who made much money while we were in slit-trenches, greasing their damned bellies. Excuse me, Bill."

He grinned.

"Tell you one thing, sir. We chaps don't mind a craftsman like you getting the guineas. It's the Yids and them like that what get us mad."

"Thanks, Bill, but I rather think casual cads may be running a bit short, and the super-scrourgers finding life not so good."

"I hope so, sir."

Isolda's Diary

I met Robert's " Bill " when I went to post a letter and he told me that his master would be home that evening.

I should have been on duty, but there were less than three people in the house, and I went across to Hurtfield. I wandered round the garden, and sat for a while in the garden house. What a contrast to The Meadows. This place has grown old and wise and kind, and I can understand how he loves it. I could love it and dearly so, after the shabby things I have suffered. I could see Rita playing here. But is that possible ?

Then I made my way to his studio. It was all so much his, his boxing-gloves and foils on the wall, the easel, the table that carried his brushes and paints. I sat down on a chair behind the door. I could feel him here, his lovely sense of colour and mystery, his fastidiousness fitness. And what was I ? A poor fool ? Yes, a fool in my first adventure, and a silly sceptical fool in this -- someone profoundly good and clean. I had thought him just primeval man, vain and a sex-flâneur. Shallow idiot ! But was not my justification part of what I had suffered ?

Then I heard a car pull in. I sat shaking like a girl. I was afraid. Almost, I wanted to hide from him. Footsteps. He came in. He did not see me at first and then he turned and found me there.

How his face lit up ! It was a good man's face, a lover's face.

And those dear words of his.

Shall I have the courage to tell him ? I must have the courage.

But if, the love should go out of his eyes !

- 19 -

I strolled across that Saturday evening when dusk had fallen and there were fewer cars to be seen. Also, I heard no orchestra and orchestras can be expensive luxuries these days. Horwood's enterprise had started with a bang, yet in a few weeks it might be showing signs of fizzling. It was a drizzly night and the yellow umbrellas were gone from the garden, and the tables were deserted. I heard two chauffeurs grousing together while smoking cigarettes, in a big limousine, and even their grubby voices were suggestive. I walked on the grass, and looked at the lighted windows of the bar and the dining room and it occurred to me that if The Meadows crashed, Isolda would be out of a job. Well, there was a permanent and perhaps a more pleasant job waiting for her !

I walked cautiously to one of the bar windows and keeping close to the wall, peered in. The place was empty, no Wheatlys, no Cavalry Moustache, but the two leading figures in the drama were there, Isolda and Harwood. He was sitting on a stool with his shoulders hunched, and his bun head looking depressed between them. He had a glass in his hand. Isolda was standing, staring at her own hands which rested on the bar counter.

I saw Horwood empty his glass at one gulp, and pass it to her.

" Fill me up again."

She took the glass, and put it down.

" You've had three."

" Well, it's my own drink, my dear."

She remained static, staring at the empty glass.

" I am not your dear."

That retort seemed to exasperate him. I dare say he was in a savage temper, and for more reasons than one. I saw his right hand go out and grasp her wrist.

"Look here, my wench, I'm not exactly in a sweet temper. If you'd been more helpful ---- "

Suddenly she twisted free, and stood back, looking him in the face.

"Helpful ! I suppose ---- "

I saw him jerk up from his stool.

"Look, young woman, I'm pretty well fed up with your bloody pretention."

She did not flinch, but looked steadily at his flushed and turgid face.

"You can remain so, Mr. Horwood. I am not completely alone -- here -- be warned."

And suddenly he sat down again on his stool.

"All right, all right, damn you. I'm worried. Fill that glass up for me and make it a stiff one."

Deliberately, she refilled his glass, and placed it before him. He was lighting a cigarette and his shoulders sagged.

"Thanks, lovely. I'll down this and go and see how the show's going. Those damned lads have let me down. It will have to be all radio."

I remained there on guard until he had emptied his glass and risen heavily from his stool. I saw his face for a moment, and it was sullen and furtive, and I got the feeling that some of the arrogance had oozed out of him.

"Better come and flop around with one or two of the old goats."

"Thank you," said she, "I prefer them on the other side of the counter."

II

Maybe I was too caring, and foolishly reassured by the way in which she had kept him at arm's length, for I went back to my house, and so to bed. I decided to be up bright and early and on the river in case she took that hour of escape, but when I drew the curtains next morning it was raining.

Not a good omen either for me or The Meadows. There would be no punt upon the river. I had had breakfast and put on a mackintosh and went out, and my luck was in, for I saw her going to the pillar-box in the lane, and I waited for her at the iron gates. On her way back she saw me, hesitated, stood still.

I crossed the road.

" Things seemed rather quiet with you last night. I only heard four car door slam."

She was silent, as though waiting for something.

" Are you in a mood to grant favours ? "

She still was silent.

" I want to paint your portrait. May I ? "

She glanced at the gate of The Meadows.

" I'm on duty all today."

" Well, what of tomorrow in the afternoon ? If it is fine it can happen in the garden."

She stood there with her hand to her cheek and I could divine her contemplating a decision.

" I might. Would it be long ? "

" Say three short sittings."

" Perhaps, perhaps not."

" Well -- I'll wait and hope for the perhaps."

III

When I woke next morning the sun was bright upon the blind. So the weather had changed its temper and was yea instead of nay. Why did she not tell me and have done with it ? Did she fear that the combination of circumstances, an illegitimate child and her association with a place

like The Meadows might prove too sinister to be accepted by a man who was not a besotted fool ? Perhaps. She wanted me to trust her just as I was trying to persuade her to trust me. And yet -- ye Gods -- how easily some modern wench would have spun a cheekingly pathetic story and gone to bed with you to prove her point.

Yes, it was going to be a gorgeous day, rain-washed and limpid and serene. I was strung up and expectant. Would she come ? I spent part of the morning on the river, and I sculled up stream. The Meadow's punts lay idle at their moorings and one solitary old fellow was sitting in a deck-chair, reading the Sunday paper.

After lunch, I carried easel, stool, canvas and my gear into the garden, with a cushioned chair for my subject. I placed them in a corner where they would not be visible from the road. I told Bill that I was expecting a visitor, and that we would have tea in the garden. Then I sat down to wait.

I kept looking at my wrist-watch. Half past two, a quarter to three, three o'clock. I became restless and got up and wandered about. I stood for a minute or two just inside the iron gates, but saw no sign of her. Was it to be -- " Perhaps not " ? I went back to my stool and filled and lit a pipe, and then I heard the clang of the Hurtfield gates. She had come.

I stood up. I could not see the gates from where I stood, but there was exultation in me. And then I saw him strolling up the drive, and my exultation became cold anger.

He spotted me and turned in my direction. His oiled black head caught the sunlight. There was a smirk upon his most unpleasant face.

" Ha, Mr. Byron, excuse me trespassing."

He looked at my easel and chair and stool and the smirk became more evident.

" Just a message. Miss Mallory has a bad headache. She's quite prostrated. Most disappointing for you. I thought I would let you know."

He grinned at me, waved an ironic paw, and turned about. My impulse was to go and take him by the collar and shake the truth out of him, but maybe I was wiser in refraining. I let him go. I heard the gates clang.

Had he threatened to spill her secret if she came to me ? It was more than possible.

But what an anti-climax !

Isolda's Diary

He wants to paint my portrait.

I have said yes.

To sit in that peaceful room with him. Perhaps the courage will come to me.

I cannot let him go on looking at me like that -- without him knowing.

Am I looking at him as he looks at me ?

I cannot help it

How caring so much makes a coward of one !

And I thought I was old boiled mutton, and tough at that.

Oh -- that beast of a Horwood !

I found him waiting for me when I got back. He had been drinking. He took me into his office and shut the door. I stood by the door, with my back to it. He splayed in a chair and leered at me.

"Neglecting your duties, my dear, I think."

"There is not much to neglect."

That seemed to set his beastly soul alight.

"Look here, Bella, take my advice and keep away from the gentleman over yonder."

"Do I receive orders as to my friends ?"

"Don't be a bloody fool. You know quite well what he's after, and if anybody is going to debauch you again -- it won't be Mr. Don Juan."

I was both angry and scared.

"So -- what, Mr. Bully ?"

"Quite simple -- isn't it ? I just go over and tell the fellow the truth -- about Carter and all that. I'll tell him too, to keep away from my mistress, or I'll thrash the life out of him."

It did not seem credible.

“ Nice person, aren’t you ? ”

“ Well, take your choice. If you go near that place again, I’ll spill the beans.”

God help me -- I funk'd it.

On that Sunday evening, I walked to Stoke Mandeville church for the evening service, a thing I sometimes did, for I liked the simple service in that little old grey building with its shingled spire and its old yews. I liked the old padre and the people who was worshipped here, for it was still somewhat the church of the peasant folk who laboured on the land. I could picture it half full of fellows in Sunday smocks with their wives and children. There were faded battle flags here, memorial tablets on the walls, and the Jacobean tomb of the Mandevilles in the Mandeville chapel. There is substance and a soothing reality in such old places, with their ancient ritual and their flavour of faith.

We say, "Fight the Good Fight," and when the old padre mounted the pulpit, with his white head and ruddy face, I had a feeling that he might have something to say that would be valid for me as well as for others. He preached on Courage and Kindness. There was no clerical slop about this old priest. He had served as a padre in the first world war, won the M.C. and had been taken prisoner in March 1918.

Courage and Kindness ! There is much talk by the Intellectuals, often over-simplification but I must confess that over-elaboration seems to be one of the more pressing problems of the day. War itself may have become more complex, and much more than a bayonet charge, but the simple virtues remain ! Have guts, don't let your pal down, don't funk things -- even though you feel in a devil of a fright. The older folks talked about character ; we are persuaded to visit psycho-analysts and get involved in primitive wizardry. As for Kindness, the old man in the pulpit asserted that it was the one salve that our world needed. We scratched our grievances and glowered, and became spiteful and jealous. Do the job which life happens to have given you and do it with all your heart and

strength and don't feel swindled because you don't happen to be a Winston Churchill. Kindness oils the wheels. That was the path of the old man's sermon. It was Biblical, and not culled from a tract-book of psychology. The moderns are much too intricate and wordy. Man may be a complex creature, but his essential reactions are simple and inevitable. He does not respond to more lecturing ; he asks to be moved, yes -- by a song or a story.

I waited in the porch for the padre. He had given me something that I needed, the courage to challenge emotion. I stood up when he appeared and put out a hand.

" Thanks, sir, for the sermon."

He smiled that happy and half mischievous smile of his.

" Was -- it -- a sermon, Mr. Byron ? "

I laughed, and he with me.

" Well, no, not exactly. Somehow Old and New Testament combined for the moderns."

" And what is -- modernity."

" Something that has its feet on the good earth, and forgets it -- because its head is in politics ? "

He chuckled

" Yes, we are so stung by words and the wrong words."

" Life being too much of a wasp's nest, sir."

II

I walked home with the old man's words settling in me. Assuredly, I had over-subtilized the situation and I realised that a woman may not ask for man to split hairs like a scholiast, but to charge in and fight for her. Yes, and cunningly so. Afterwards would come kindness. I had the proof to

offer, and my problem would not be solved by casuistry.

I did not go to The Meadows that night, for the Sabbath and that sermon asked to be considered. I put the studio in order, and placed the child's portrait for her to see, but I did wander out into the lane and look at the windows of what I now felt to be her prison house. If Horwood had tied her up with fear, I would cut those binds, and if necessary give him the thrashing he needed. I will confess that I gloated over the prospect, and his illusion that he considered me a mere colourful cissy.

III

It was about two o'clock when I walked towards the Hurtfield gates. I had warned Bill and Betty that I might have a sitter in the studio and that I did not want to be disturbed. Old Potter was taking a day off in his own cottage garden. I was within a few yards of my gates when I saw Horwood's red car poke its snout into the lane. He paused to see that the road was clear and then drove off in the direction of Abbotsbridge. My impression was that he had not noticed me.

I crossed the road, walked up The Meadow's drive, and in by the porch door. She was there in the lounge, arranging flowers in a tall plain vase. When she saw me, she stood quite still, the stillness of a creature who is afraid. Then her hands came to life, touching the flowers, but her eyes were on mine, and her hands moved blindly.

I said, "Isolda, I have something to show you."

"I'm afraid -- I'm busy here."

I walked into the lounge and stood close to her. We had the place to ourselves.

"It is really rather important, my dear."

The flowers needed no more attention, but she continued to touch them,

and she looked so like a scared child that my decision was inevitable. It was the cutting of the knot. I put an arm round her, and felt her stiffen.

“ You are coming to see what I have to show you, even if I have to carry you, my dear.”

I was tense and so was she, and then I felt a kind of melting of her muscles.

“ Must I ? ”

“ Yes, you must. Something that may matter terribly to both of us. And it is good, not evil.”

She moved with a soft, swaying motion as I steered her gently towards the door. I heard voices and she gave me a quick, appealing glance, and I let my arm drop.

“ No turning back -- now.”

She sighed, but her eyes had lost their glaze of fear.

We were out in the sun together. We passed down the drive and out of the gates and across the road and when we were through my gates, I took her hand and she did not repulse me. Her hand might have been her child's hand, consenting and trustful, and I felt a great gladness in me.

“ Not the house -- but the studio.”

She was profile to me, but about her lips I saw the beginnings of a smile. I believe that she thought that I had been putting her in colour, which I had, but that was not the portrait of the moment. As we crossed the lawn above the river, I saw Merlin the Tree signalling to me, or that was my fancy, and I paused and pointed out the cedar to her.

“ Do you see that tree ? ”

“ Which one ? ”

“ The fellow over there with the slanting top.”

“ Yes.”

“ That's my signature tree and he is blessing both of us this morning.”

So, we came to the studio and I opened the door for her and let go of her hand. The child's portrait was facing us, and she must not have seen it initially, for she stood rigid and very still.

I had been wondering all the while whether a letter from Mary Payelly might have given away my secret, but as I stood and watched Isolda, I knew that it was not so.

I think it was quite half a minute before she spoke.

"Where -- did you ---- ?"

I kept my distance.

"In a place called St. Mawes. Rita and I discovered each other, and I fell for Rita. Won't you go nearer ?"

She took three or four slow steps, and stood looking at the picture, with one hand to her cheek. She said -- in a strange and half stifled voice -- "So, you know."

I went close to her now, and put a hand on her shoulders.

"All that I need to know my dear. You can leave it all just where you please."

Suddenly, she turned and looked at me, and in a new way.

"Did you go there -- when you went away ?"

I nodded.

"You remember that letter which was delivered here by mistake ? No, I did not open it. I saw the postmark. And do you remember tearing it up and throwing the pieces into the river ? Well, there must have been something inevitable about it all. One piece floated into my boat house and it was the one word ' Rita '."

She was silent.

"Yes, just that. Perhaps you will forgive me -- someday."

"I might forgive you now."

We were close to each other now, and I slipped my hand down and put my

arm about her.

"It's a lovely little face. And almost she has your hair, but lighter. I fell for the little freckles and her nose. And it's so clean and happy."

She was silent for some seconds.

Then she said, "Can you understand that in a rather beastly world a little thing like that can -- somehow -- keep one sane?"

"I can, and very much so."

She raised a hand and clasped mine.

"Thank you. But you don't know -- yet ----"

"Need I?"

"Of course."

"Well, when you please, my sweet. And now, I am going to paint your portrait."

I removed the child's picture and propped it on the sofa and placed a fresh canvas on the easel. I had a chair upon which I sometimes posed my sitters in a Louis Quince chair. There was a sudden playfulness in me. I became the 18th century beau, and with a hand over heart, I besought my lady to take the chair. I handed her up and as she tuned to seat herself, my mood of happy playfulness seemed to manifest in her.

"Thank you, monsieur."

I bowed again.

"Will her Majesty try the chair?"

She sat and her pose was perfect and I had a feeling that her face had become like the face of her child. She gave me one of Rita's mischievous looks and it was the first time that I had seen happy mischief in her eyes.

"All -- but the freckles, madam."

"You fell for the freckles?"

"I did."

"I wonder if they are permanent. In fifteen years time she won't love

them."

"Someone will."

I had placed my table of paints, brushes, and etceteras below the chair, and when I glanced at her, her eyes had an almost tearing and jocund look.

"You know, monsieur, you were not quite -- credible."

"Credible? Just why?"

Her eyes held mine.

"So much too good-looking to be credible."

Could I blush? But I think I understood her.

"You would say that only the plain can understand the fair?"

"I might."

"There are exceptions."

"I began to know now -- that there can be."

It is a fad of mine that I prefer to paint in my shirt, with the sleeves rolled up, and I hung my coat over the back of a chair. I had a feeling that this was going to be a conversation piece as well as the beginning of a portrait. I took a glance at her. She was posed there with perfect ease, shoulder and arms relaxed, her face like a face that conceals the beginning of a smile.

"Excellent," said I.

I know instinctively when a sitter is at ease or strung up and tense with self-consciousness.

"May I talk?"

"Of course."

"Did Rita pose -- well?"

"Perfectly. Without fear or favour."

She smiled.

"Fear. Yes, there has been so much fear. I -- was born in Vienna. I saw the Germans and the Russians, and then -- the English."

I looked up at her over the canvas.

“Do you know -- the first time I saw you -- it was in Vienna or Florence.”

She closed her eyes for a moment and spoke.

“My father was Austrian, my mother -- English. We came to England often in the old days. After it all happened, I took my mother's name, Mallory.”

She opened her eyes and looked down at me, and I felt the urgent question in that look.

“It is a lovely nose. So, you married an Englishman.”

She did not wince, but looked at me steadfastly.

“I thought I did.”

I began to paint.

“And then ---- ”

“We came to England. He was sent to Palestine. He was killed there. Only then -- did I find out that I was not his wife.”

I nodded and kept my eyes for a moment on the canvas.

“You poor darling.”

“Oh, I suppose it was just the war. War can make men like that -- seize the sensation and damn tomorrow. Rita was born a month after I found out. I had a little money, but it soon went. I took two or three different jobs, but they lasted only -- until I had to say no.”

“I think I get your reason. Quite a number of respectable citizens need thrashing.”

We were silent for a minute or so, I painting, she looking wide-eyed at memories.

I said, “Do you know how much this touches me? Thank you, my dear.”

“I'll go on. The last time I went to a new Agency, and heard of this. I was sick of London. I wanted to be in the country and this -- seemed good. I met him and he was quite pleasant to me. I had learnt to look after myself.

I had gone on a short, cheap holiday to St. Mawes, and I met the Payellys -- good people."

"Very good."

"I hated it, but I left her with them. It all seemed so clean and kind down there."

"In the main -- it is."

"I was coming back -- that day we met at Paddington."

I went on painting.

I said, "There seems to be something inevitable about all this. I would like to think of it in that way. May I?"

I glanced up and saw her face, and what I saw there shocked me. She was staring wide-eyed past me towards the studio door.

Then I heard his voice.

"Very pretty, very pretty indeed!"

Isolda's Diary

He came for me, I surrendered. I just felt that this was fate. And somehow there was laughter at the back of his eyes, lover's laughter, and not the glare of sex-greed.

I just did not care ! I drifted and then in the studio -- I saw the child's face looking at me from the easel, and my knees seemed to go weak. So -- he knew. But how -- and how much ?

He was very gentle with me and full of playful and tender courtesy. I might have been a great Madame. Was I that to him ? That is what he made me feel.

I sat on that old French chair, and he began to paint and I know that time had come to tell him everything. It seemed so easy now, like confessing to a wise and kind priest. I watched his face and it did not lose the lover's look and I thought -- If ever we are to be comrades, I will go down my knees and scrub the floors of life for you till I have no hands left.

We talked of that day at Paddington. He said that it all seemed inevitable now, and I realised what a shallow fool I had been in misreading him.

And then -- what I might have expected. I saw the Beast standing in the studio doorway, and heard his mocking voice.

" Very pretty, very pretty indeed ! "

- 21 -

He was standing in the studio doorway, his legs a'straddle, his hands in his trouser pockets, and there was an ugly grin on his face. So, he had played a trick on us, taken his car out, waited and come back to create this crisis, for a crisis it was to be.

I stood and faced him and I began with ironic courtesy.

"I think you can conclude that I do not welcome visitors when I am working, Mr. Harwood."

He gave me back irony.

"And are you working, Mr. Bryon?"

"I am painting Miss Mallory's portrait."

He strolled in, and his belly and apple red cheeks seemed to bulge at me.

"Considerate of you to use the Miss."

Then he caught sight of the child's picture on the sofa and turned to look at it.

"All complete. The sweet little bastard is present at the party."

I put down my brush and palette. I kept a handbell in the studio and on a side table. I rang it. I glanced at Isolda. She was standing, rigid and blanched, and my anger grew in me.

I said, "I think this interview is -- our -- concern, Mr. Horwood."

"As you please."

He pushed the child's portrait to one side and sprawled on the sofa.

Then Betty appeared and I spoke to her.

"Oh, Betty, will you please show Miss Mallory into the parlour."

I saw Isolda hesitate. She gave me a frightened look and I gathered that her fear was for me. I smiled at her and she stepped down from the chair.

I said, "We can go on with the work presently."

How much Betty knew or guessed, I cannot say. Anyhow the two women went

out together and I still remember the backward look Isolda gave me. It said, "Oh, take care. He can be dangerous." Dangerous? And I was feeling damned dangerous, and only too ready for action. I went and closed the studio door and locked it and I turned the key up and down so that he might draw his own conclusions.

"Now, Mr. Horwood. Have you any more unpleasant things to say?"

He sat reclined on the sofa, waggling his great legs, and eyeing me ironically. Had anyone prepared to produce the veritable villain of melodrama -- he was it.

"Rather innocent, Mr. Byron, aren't you? Or are you?"

"Not so innocent."

He flapped the back of a hand against the child's portrait.

"You don't object to another fellow's bastard?"

"Let's say I object to certain sorts of blackguard."

He laughed.

"Meaning me?"

I nodded at him. I was getting colder and colder in my anger, and more exultantly cool. I tossed the studio key up and down and then slipped it into a trouser pocket.

"Anything else, Mr. Horwood?"

"I think so."

"Well, out with it."

"I suppose you are the sort of cissy who falls for another man's tart."

I looked at him steadily.

"Get up, Horwood. There is only one thing to do with a crapulent cad like you."

I'll admit that I was almost caught out by the surprising swiftness with which he bounced up off the sofa and came at me. He swung a leg, and luckily for me I was very much on my toes, and that dirty trick failed to

work. His shoe just brushed my body. I caught him by the ankle with both hands and gave his leg a twist, and then heaved it up. He went down with a crash that shook the floor and lay there for a second or two, dazed yet furious. I had hurt him.

I said, "No more cad's tricks, Horwood. Get up and fight."

He sat up, and turned sideways on the floor, and luckily for me, I guessed what his game was. He meant to make a dive for my legs and get me down, and that was what he tried. Well, two could kick, and I swung a leg and caught him a lovely one on the chin, and it so stunned him that his grab failed. He squatted there half dazed and I waited.

"I know some of these tricks, Horwood. Get up and fight, you fat bastard."

He sat glaring at me, his hands on the floor. Then he was up, but not so quickly, and I sailed in on him. I was feeling good, oh so damned good. I fainted with my left and then got in an upper-cut with my right. It jerked his head back, and dazed him, and his fat legs sagged.

I held off a moment, smiling at him. Never in my life had I enjoyed such a show as this, and I was minded to spin it out. Then I saw him make a grab at a stool, and my anger flared.

"Put that down, you filthy bastard."

He made a swing at me, but I warded it off, yet the blow hurt me, and I went mad. I hoisted the stool from him, sent it crashing, and set about him without mercy. He reeled around, and staggered, and then he tried to clinch with me, and I got in a short armed punch to his plexus. His belly was like a bag of dough. He gasped, tried to clutch me and close, and I hit him again in the same place.

After that it was just murder, and I felt like murder. He remained on his feet longer than I had expected, his arms flailing blindly. I concentrated on his face, for by the living God -- he should be a marked man. I smashed

in blow after blow and my knuckles were bloody, both with my blood and his. His nostrils were running blood, and I had split his lip. Then I gave him a right on the chin, and he went down, and his head hit the floor.

He lay there, arms spread, well and truly out.

I heard a knocking at the door, and Bill's voice.

"Sir -- sir."

I took the key from my pocket and went and unlocked the door upon Bill's grim face. I guessed that he had heard the racket and thought I was being beaten up.

"All right, Bill. The gentleman and I had a difference of opinion and I settled it."

"Seems so, sir."

He grinned and looked down at Horwood. His chest and his belly were heaving like a pair of bellows, but he was still unconscious, and his face was a pulped and bloody mess.

"I'm afraid I've enjoyed myself, Bill."

"Just look at your hands, sir."

"Yes, knuckles a bit skinned. Well, Bill, you had better go across to The Meadows, and get two of his people to come across and take him home."

Bill went and I sat on my stool and waited for Horwood to come round. The black streak of hair on his low forehead was licking blood, and his eyelids were becoming swollen bladders. I saw his hands open and close. He groaned. His eyes opened. They were mere slits.

I said, "Better be still, Horwood. I have sent for some of your people to take you home."

He said nothing. He turned his head and spat blood out on the floor and I saw a tooth among the blood.

Then, I don't know why, but I felt another presence. I glanced towards the studio doorway and saw her standing there. The look in her eyes was

indescribable. I could not have put it in words.

I spoke to her.

"No place for you, darling. Go back to the house. I'll be with you in a minute. I mean -- our house. They are taking this beast back to the other place."

She must have seen my hands.

"Oh, -- your poor hands!"

"Mostly -- the result of hitting something. Go back to our house."

She gave me a strange smile and went.

II

Not a word as yet from the thing on the floor. I sat and watched him and I felt that smashed up though he was, the beast could still be dangerous.

I said, "Take this to heart, Horwood. No more messing about with my and her affairs. Do you hear?"

He cursed me, and his language was as foul as his face.

"Cut that out, Horwood."

But he went on cursing and spitting and heaving until two of his waiters arrived with Bill. They looked at him, and I think I saw satisfaction on their faces.

"You chaps had better help him home."

One of them grinned at me.

"Yes, sir. You sure have broken the jam-pot."

And that was that.

III

I found Isolda and Betty in the parlour and it seemed to me that these two

women understood each other and had become friendly all in five minutes. Betty had been busy. I saw a basin of hot water on a coffin stool, and lint and wool and a bandage laid out on a clean towel. She looked at my hands, and she looked at my face and her smile was a hero's garland.

"Your poor hands, sir. Shall I ring up the doctor?"

I laughed.

"I think he may be needed somewhere else."

Then, Betty whisked herself out of the room, and I was alone with Isolda. We looked at each other, and there was something in her eyes which I could not translate.

"Where did the good child get all this?"

"I don't know."

She made a movement with one of her hands, and I went and stood by the stool. She dipped a finger into the water to test its temperature, and pulled a wad of wool from the roll. She was looking at my hands. I put the right hand on the basin, and she dipped the wool into the water and very gently sponged the blood away. It stung, for my knuckles were skinned. I must have winced, and her eyes lifted quickly to mine.

"It hurts? I'm so sorry."

"Oh -- nothing. I never felt better in my life."

"You must go to a doctor, and have them properly dressed."

"I am not worrying my dear, nor must you."

She was silent, cleaning my skinned knuckles, and I thought of Tristan and Isolda. Isolda had washed Tristan's wound, but it had been far more serious than barked skin. Betty had left a pair of scissors on the table, and Isolda cut squares of lint and laid them on the backs of my hands. She took the bandages, and was wrapping it round my hands, when I happened to glance at her face and was shocked and profoundly moved by what I saw. Tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"Darling, you mustn't cry. What is it?"

She was bandaging my right hand, and I put my left upon her shoulder.

"Don't you know that you are not going back to that damned house?"

She gave me a wet and pathetic look.

"It's my job."

"What? Do you think I am going to let you go back there? You are staying here with me until we fix up something."

I drew her to me and kissed her forehead, and she bent her head and let it rest against mine. She was sobbing now, and her hands were motionless.

"How can I?"

"Good God -- because I want you as I have never wanted anyone else."

I felt her shaking.

"What did -- he -- tell you?"

"Just what you might expect from a cad like that. And I beat the breath out of him."

"Did you -- believe it?"

I am afraid I forgot all about my hands. I put my arms round her and held her close.

"Not one damned word of it. Isolda, will you marry me?"

She pressed her face against mine, and her tears were wet on my cheek.

"I can't -- not yet."

"Darling, take it slowly. You know -- I can understand all that you have been through."

She clung to me.

"Are you -- real? It -- it doesn't seem possible. I -- I've been so lonely, and so hard."

"Well, my sweet, that's all going to be in the past. And here is an idea. You can go down and join the child. I'll take you down. I suppose you could stay at the Payelly's?"

She was just like a weeping and rather helpless child.

" I could -- but all my things are over there."

" I'll deal with that."

" And -- and ---- "

" Not much filthy money ? My dear, can't you let me be responsible ? "

And suddenly she kissed me.

" Oh, I'm forgetting all about your dear hands."

IV

Bill and I took Betty with us, for a woman knows more about another woman's stuff than a man can, and with Betty with us there was less likelihood of this being a rough house, though, from what I had seen of the faces of the two waiters, Horwood's licking had caused them more joy than sorrow. I rang the bell and one of the same waiters appeared and he grinned at me.

" We have come to collect Miss Mallory's things. You can show us her room."

He was cheerful and complacent. He trotted up the stairs, ahead of us, and showed us her door. It was unlocked and we went in and set about that most strange job. I told Bill to stay at the top of the stairs as a watchdog, while Betty opened drawers and I found that same old Paddington suitcase under the bed. Her belongings were pathetically few, and it moved me to be in this room of hers watching Betty's comfortable and clean little hands dealing with those intimate details. The suitcase accepted all of them, save a cheap, utility fore-coat, which I slung over my arm.

" So that's all, Betty ? "

" Yes, sir."

" Thank you, my dear. One is glad of someone like you at a time such as

this.”

She was silent -- but smiling. And then she said, “It’s easy to do things for you, sir.”

V

I told Betty that Miss Mallory would be staying with us for a day or two, and asked her to get the Queen’s Room ready. I imagine that both Bill and Betty must have begun to suspect that Hurtfield might be a house of romance, and I wondered how they would react to any change, but that was all in the future. Betty was a warm-hearted little creature, and Bill a reliable soul who did not cultivate grievances or class-spite. Like the Payellys, they both loved children and were -- I knew -- secretly sad because no child had come to them. So what of Rita? That little freckled face might prove to be an appeal.

I found Isolda sitting on a high backed Jacobean chair in the parlour. I closed the door, and when I saw her face I knew that our crisis was not over.

I said, “Everything is resolved. They are getting your room ready.”

She looked like some austere and sacrificial young Madonna.

“I am calmer now. I want you to tell me -- what he said to you.”

I was still carrying her poor, cheap coat, and I laid it across the back of a chair.

“Is it likely, Isolda. I don’t think he will repeat those lies.”

I went and stood close to her. Somehow I could not bear the stark, frozen face she showed me.

She said, “How can I prove -- everything to you? It cannot be proved, and that leaves me -- cold and bitter.”

I said, “Isolda, I believe and will believe everything you care to tell

me. And why? Think, my dear. Because -- somehow -- I know what is true, and would go to the stake for it. For God's sake, don't be hard with me."

She gave me a strange, upward look, and suddenly she fell on her knees, and clasped mine.

"Oh -- bless you -- my man, bless you."

Profoundly moved, I put my arm about her and lifted her up. I kissed her on the forehead.

"There's my pledge. Let it live in your heart."

Isolda's Diary

This must sound like melodrama, but it was not melodrama to me. I made myself sit still in that lovely old room of his, for I wanted to rush back to the studio. Strange, but I was afraid for his sake, and very little for my own. I seemed to know that there would be a show-down between them, and that that great big beast was dangerous, and might hurt him. Believe it or not, but I saw a couple of old swords laying crossed on a wall, and I had to keep myself from taking one of them and going back to the studio. I felt that if he had hurt my Robert, I could slash his face to pieces.

An old grandfather clock stood in a corner ticking steadily. It was a calm old clock and its beat-beat was not like mine. I watched its hands. Five minutes, ten minutes and still the damnable suspense. I just could not bear it any longer.

I ran into the good Bill in the hall and he grinned at me.

"It's all right, madam."

I made for the studio, and never in my life did I see a thing that seemed so good to me. The beast was just a bloody mess on the floor, and Robert was standing there -- untouched.

I'm afraid I let go.

"Oh -- Robert!"

He held me.

"No place for you, darling. Go back and wait."

Then I saw his hands, skinned and bleeding.

"Oh -- your poor hands!"

And he laughed.

"I don't think -- that thing will try any more foul tricks on us."

But I wanted to know.

"What did he say to you?"

“ Forget it. A pretty collection of lies. I don't think I have ever enjoyed anything so much as this in all my life.”

What a man !

I went back to the house and when Betty came to me I was blubbing !

Yes, he had said other dear things to me which were sacred and not to be put down on paper.

- 22 -

The contemporary scene is so packed with particular and provoking problems, and the social revolution so much with us, that a romantic man - - if such a creature persists -- may find himself taking a toss, and a most unromantic toss among the pots and pans. I suppose it would never have occurred to a Victorian bachelor that he might have to chose between marrying the lady of his choice or losing his -- err -- too devoted staff. Should he put away the tailcoat and so be reduced to wearing the apron, or remain celibate and retain domestic comfort ? To begin with, man makes such a mess of his social adaptations. He misuses the car, the aeroplane, and the wireless and behaves like some crass little exhibitionist, blaring a tin trumpet about the house. I am afraid that if I did foresee domestic problems I did not take them very seriously or pick my future wife for the dual parts of cook and housemaid, while I played butler and general help. Besides, what of it ? We were both young and healthy, and not two poor old relics of a dead culture dying of semi-starvation amid dust and weeds.

But this is a digression, reality poured like a basket of slop over the head of romance. There may be humour and even romance in domestic disharmonies, but when I rose very early next morning I saw Betty going to the door of the Queen's Chamber with a tray of early morning tea.

I blessed Betty.

I was on the way to the bath. I said, " Betty, my dear, just a moment. In being kind to someone, you are be being kind to me. I don't know whether that counts with you, but I do rather value you and Bill."

She crinkled up her nose at me.

" Well, I don't forget one thing, sir."

" What's that Betty ? "

" But for you, I might not have had Bill."

II

I have come to the conclusion that -- in the main -- the good things one may do continue on the credit side, and that, although humanity has a tendency for forgetting, all is not forgotten and not by everybody.

Isolda and I met at breakfast, and what a strange meal it was, she -- serious and soft lipped -- and vaguely shy and suggesting Rita to me, and not the tough and harridan young woman who had to fight and fight alone against much that is sinister in man. I had stood up when she had come into the room and somehow and without hesitation she had taken the service side of the gate-legged table.

“Is it sugar?”

“Saccharin -- I’m afraid. Betty does so much boiling and jamming.”

She poured out my coffee.

“How do you manage milk -- for coffee?”

“That is a privileged question. I sometimes get presents. Do you know what Betty says?”

“She’s a sweet thing, Betty.”

“And honest. Well, Betty’s verdict is that the Socialists are turning us into a nation of scroungers.”

“Because everybody has to do it -- or go without?”

“Exactly.”

I saw her looking at my hands.

“You must go and see a doctor about your hands.”

“All right, I will. We’ll drive into Abbotsbridge and I’ll see my friend Sam. And we can wire the Payellys, with a prepaid reply. By the way -- how did Queens Bess’ chamber please you?”

She smiled at the coffee pot.

"Some rooms -- seem full of tranquil breathing."

"And that is what I want for you, my sweet, always and everywhere."

She gave me a look which I shall always remember.

III

After breakfast and half a pipe, I got the car out and we started for Abbotsbridge. I saw her glance at the gates of The Meadows, and it was a kind of swift, flinching, half-frightened stare. It touched me all the more so when I felt her relax beside me, her hands lying restfully in her lap. Yes, life must have been pretty beastly for her over yonder and with nothing between her and the Horwood world but a tough and flippant exterior. Her beauty must have been a perpetual allure, like perfect fruit to wasps and blowflies, and her beauty had the rare quality of fastidiousness. There is much fallacious loveliness in the world which is but skin-deep and some wench who looks like an angel can behave like a Purple Poll.

We did not say much to each other on that drive, and there is something more exquisite than intimate chatter, the intimacy of a secure silence when two people feel that they have come together. Now and again I saw her glancing at my hands. The quality of that look gave me a masculine thrill. Those hands of mine had been hurt in her service and I -- as man -- had managed to convince her that as man, I was -- adequate.

I drove first to Sam Baker's house, and leaving Isolda in the car, rang the bell. It was early and Sam was in the surgery, and when I was shown into his consulting room, he came in and gave me a blue-eyed grin. He was a stocky and loveable person, with -- I believe -- a placid temper but a capacity in his younger days for using his fists. There was no nonsense about Sam, and his kindness was inexorable.

“ Ha, ha, my lad -- I was wondering whether you might be needing a little attention.”

“ Just -- why ? ”

“ Oh, well -- I was called last night to the other -- gentleman, and I heard a story.”

We grinned at each other.

“ I took the skin off my knuckles.”

“ Well, you made a nice mess of him, or rather -- a very nasty mess.”

“ Yes, of a very nasty person.”

He nodded to me.

“ Diagnosis accurate -- I should say. Come into the surgery and I'll clean you up.”

Among other things, he told me that I had broken Horwood's lower jaw. And did I expect to be sued for damages ? He was in a laughing mood, but behind his joking I divined Sam the Fighting Man. Doctors should be safe with secrets, if those secrets deserve to be kept, and I knew that the man who was attending to my hands must be wondering about origins and causes. And so I told him, as man to man.

“ Well, what would you have done, Sam ? ”

“ Broken both his jaws -- if possible. Nice neighbour to have.”

“ Yes. That is one of my problems.”

When he had finished the job, I asked him to come out and meet the woman I hoped to marry. Isolda was sitting there watching the Abbotsbridge traffic, and for a moment she did not see us, and I rapped on the car a window.

“ Isolda. Here is Dr. Baker. I'd like you to meet him.”

She turned. She looked startled and defensive, and then she smiled. Sam had walked round the car to her window, and his eyes were mischievously kind.

“ Dr. Samuel Baker, Miss Isolda Mallory.”

He gave me a quizzical look.

“ Formalities satisfied. Samuel -- forsooth ! Do I look like a Samuel ? ”

She gave him her hand.

“ No, not quite a Samuel.”

We laughed.

IV

At the Abbotsbridge post office we sent a wire to the Payellys, and then I managed to ring up the “ Ship and Castle.” Could they put me up again for a few days ? I was asked to hold on and then Morseley himself came to the phone. I was to be lucky. A reservation for a single room had just been cancelled and they could take me on the Sunday. Isolda had gone back to the car, and I joined her and told her that I had been lucky fortunate.

Did she want to do any shopping ? Apparently she did not. Then, would she like a drive, somewhere up in the Downs where the world was at peace ?

“ I'd love it.”

So, I took her though Michleham, and up the steep lane behind Bove Hill. We passed Meredith's house, and high up on the Michleham Downs I pulled the car on to a grass verge, and got out and opened her door. I know this spot very well. The old agger of Stone Street could be traced as a green bank not far away.

I gave her a hand and helped her out and her hand seemed to rest happily in mine. We found the old tracking and sat down under a hedge and her hand was still in mine.

I said, “ Let's sit and dream of the people who passed this way, in Roman days. Soldiers, merchants, wagons full of corn, ladies going Londonwards. The old days, my dear, when Britain knew peace for some three hundred

years."

She sat there looking at the landscape.

"Somehow -- I can feel that peace."

"Can you, Isolda? Then all is good."

She turned her head and smiled at me.

"How good, when other things are good."

When we had sat awhile, looking out upon this England in its summer green, so still and serene under a gracious sky, we got up and wondered along the ghost-way of that old Roman road. I put an arm about her. We were like two young lovers, girl and boy in that first phase of happy enchantment, when each is a little and happily shy of the other. There was all the wonder and almost childish wonder in me that transcends both words and senses. It was sufficient for me to touch her almost reverently and look at her as something infinitely precious. Already I seemed to discover a change in her -- she looked younger, more girlish, less armed against life.

Queer thoughts come to one. I found myself considering modern love as it is rendered on the films, the hero kissing the heroine as though he would leave no lips left to her, or was sucking an orange dry. And I laughed.

She glanced up at me questioningly. Why -- laughter? I paused, and turned her gently to me, and kissed her forehead.

"That's why."

She looked at me like Rita.

"And why ----?"

"Not a film salute, -- darling. I feel rather like a kid in a musical play."

She looked straight into my eyes.

"Thank you -- for being -- you."

V

We found a wire waiting for us from the Payellys. They could take Isolda, and Rita sent her love. So, we could travel on the Thursday. It could not be by car, for I had not enough petrol coupons, and I wondered whether we could find seats on the train. I told Isolda I would rush up and see what I could do. Would she care to come? She said she would, and do some shopping for the trip.

We went. We took a taxi to Oxford Street where I dropped her and drove on to Paddington. We were to meet at my club for lunch. Paddington looked like a mad-house, seething with a holiday crowd, but at the reservation office I was lucky. I was offered two first class corner seats in a non-smoker.

I was feeling gay, even in the face of a rather grim little clerk who attended to me. He was efficient and icily polite and when I paid him, I placed an extra half-crown on the counter.

"Thanks for courteous service."

He glared at me and chucked the coin with a contemptuous clang into the till. So -- I -- a snob -- had sinned against aggressive class-structures. Was it that he did not like half crowns or the gentlemen who looked too much a gentleman? First class? I wondered. Perhaps such gestures were out of place in his brave new world.

VI

I sent a wire to Morseley, asking him to arrange for a car to meet us at Truro, and then I repeated the adventure of queuing for a taxi. No rain today, no deluge through the roof, no sordid little cad to glare at my tie, no odoriferous old lady, no Botticelli girl with glorious hair. The crowd

was much the same, but taxis more plentiful.

I reached my club to find Isolda sitting in the lounge with a brown paper parcel on her knees.

"Any luck -- darling?"

"Something for Rita."

"Good. I'll put that in the office for you. Yes, I've got seats. What about a little drink?"

Fred the Barman in his clean white coat, smiled at us both. We sat on stools and so far as she was concerned, on the right side of the bar. I raised my glass to her and gave her a look that should have been sufficient.

We lunched, had coffee and smoked our cigarettes. I was feeling proud of my partner. She was wearing the same frock she had worn at Paddington, but her face was not the face of a wet and dreary June.

I said, "There is a little adventure in the air. Do you mind?"

"I might."

"Be -- merciful, just to please poor man."

She smiled at me.

"That might be both easy and difficult."

The commissionaire collected a taxi for us, and I told the man to drive to Shelton's in Duke Street. I had a wad of money on me. When we arrived, I opened the door for her, she looked at the Shelton window, and then at me. I nodded at her, and paid off the driver.

"Rather a poor place -- this."

She hesitated.

"Must you ----?"

"It's a happy day."

She gave me a soft, consenting look and I opened the shop door for her.

Mr. Shelton served us in person. He produced a tray of rings.

I said, "We'll both choose and see if we agree."

My choice was diamonds and emeralds in an antique setting, she -- a much simpler thing at half the price of the one I favoured.

"This one, Robert, please."

She gave me a pleading look and I had to humour her.

VII

There are days when the simplest of happenings seem more vivid and to possess a quite mysterious significance, and such was the day when we travelled together down to Cornwall. We had lunch and tea on the train and I was as proud as Tristan of the Isolda who sat opposite me. She had a brocade bag with her which travelled from carriage to restaurant car and at tea it lay propped against the window. I pretended to admire it. I picked it up, and then -- with studied, almost -- melodrama, nursed it on my lap. I had an envelope ready in my pocket and I slipped the envelope in the bag. She was looking out of the window, and I don't think she realised the trick I was playing.

Then Truro, and Joe and a car and King Harry Ferry, and all that magical Cornish scene. St. Just in Roseland. What a name and what an evening, and what romance beside me.

I told Joe to drive down the steep lane to the Payelly's cottage. I was holding Isolda's hand. We saw the white cottage and the white fence and the gay little gardens and a child waiting at a gate.

Isolda was out of the car before I was, and I felt it to be her right.

"Darling ----!"

"Oh, mummy."

She was picked up and kissed. And then I saw her little freckled face smiling at me over her mother's shoulder.

“ Why it’s -- you.”

She was put down. Her arms came out to me, and I gathered her up, and she gave me a resounding kiss.

“ Fancy your being with mother. And aren’t you strong.”

I kissed her again and looked at Isolda.

“ Now, isn’t that a nice thing for a man to hear from the lips of such a lovely ? ”

And then her mother laughed, and I think it was the first time such laughter had come from her.

Isolda's Diary

I was worried about his poor hands. I did what I could but I made him come with me and see his doctor.

I am to stay at Hurtfield for a night or two and then I am to go to St. Mawes. Thank heaven, I have a little money put away and I can manage for a while.

He and Betty went across to The Meadows and collected my things. He would not let me go near the place again. Two of Horwood's fellows had to come and half-carry him back to the house. And he thought Robert was a cissy. What a lovely jest !

We found the doctor in. As a matter of fact, he was just back from The Meadows. They had rung him up and said Horwood had an accident.

Accident ! Robert and Dr. Sam had a good laugh over it. I like Dr. Sam Baker. So, Robert had broken the beast's jaw. Oh, splendid ! And there are no bones broken in his hands, just bruised and skinned knuckles. He will have to keep them dressed for a day or two. We bought some dressings and New Skin at Boots.

We were lucky too, over the telephone. The Morseleys can take him. We sent a reply paid wire to the Payelly's.

" Want to shop, Isolda ? "

I did not. I wanted to save my money.

" Like to drive to some peaceful spot ? "

" I should."

He drove me up to the Downs above Michleham, and parked the car in the grass. He said he was looking for the old Roman Road which could be seen here as a broad grass bank. He called it the agger. We wandered about, holding hands, and when we found the grave of that Roman road we sat down on the grass under a hedge and I nursed one of his bandaged hand in my lap.

It was a very lovely and remote here and as we sat there together a great feeling of peace came to me. I was full of wonder, almost childish wonder at the loveliness of this English landscape and the mysteries of good and evil. For today, all was utterly good.

I heard his laugh and I turned my face. Why laughter ? He kissed me on the forehead.

“ Not a film salute, darling. I feel rather like a kid in a musical play.”

The Payellys can take me. Rita and I can share a room.

I feel as though I was going about in a dream and what a comrade he is to go about with. It is all so new to me, this courtesy and consideration and kindness. May I go on dreaming like this.

He took me up to London. We lunched at his club, or our club as he called it. Then, that drive in a taxi and he looking playful and mysterious. A jeweller and a ring.

He wanted to give me a most expensive ring. No, my dear, any ring you give me will be sufficiently precious. I chose a much simpler thing.

Paddington Station and what a different Paddington ! I still felt that I was living in a dream. And every time I met his eyes there was a lovelier smile in them.

Then Truro and a car and the ferry and the water and all that magical Cornish scene. He told me that this was the country of Tristan and Isolda. “ Your country, my dearest.” St. Just in Roseland. And what a name, and what an evening, in a what a man beside me !

We drove down the steep lane, and I saw the child at the little white gate. I was out of the car before him. Rita's arms were round my neck.

Then she looked over my shoulder.

“ Why, it's Uncle Bob ! ”

I put her down and he picked her up and her arms went round his neck.

“Fancy you being with mummy. And aren't you strong.”

I laughed, and such laughter was new to me.

These halcyon days were spent by the three of us in inexpressible joy-making. Joe drove us around, Peter took us for cruises in his boat, and Rita and I flirted. I was Uncle Bob to her, and I was wondering how she would accept me in a more intimate relationship.

I and her mother had on that last morning our first unquarrelsome quarrel. We had climbed up to the Castle and was sitting on the grass when she produced something from the bosom of her frock. She spoke to the child.

“ Rita, darling, go and pick some flowers.”

When the child had gone, her mother passed me the envelope which I had slipped into her bag.

“ Please take this back.”

“ Why should I ? ”

“ Please. I’m not for sale.”

That soured me.

“ Good God -- you ought to know by now ---- ”

“ I do know.”

“ My dear, don’t hurt me.”

She put out a quick hand.

“ Does it hurt you to ---- ? ”

“ It does,” I answered.

“ Well, let’s make a bargain.”

“ Need we ? ”

“ Yes. I’ll keep this -- until ---- ”

“ Until what ? ”

“ Never mind. On trust -- Robert.”

She slipped the envelope back into her bosom.

II

I introduced Isolda to the Morseleys before I left for home. In fact, she and the Morseleys dined with me as my guests, and Isolda and Mrs. Morseley were friends from the first glance. Both were so comely that neither needed to be jealous of the other, and both were women of such fine temperament that sympathy was easy between them. Both had a continental background, and each of them was the mother of a child. This Polish girl with her lovely hair, and her kind fresh face was to be of more significance to both of us than I suspected.

Isolda drove with me to Truro. She waited on the platform with me for the London train. She had asked me for what she called an interlude. I thought that I could divine her reasons. Maybe, she wished for a pause in our emotional relationship after all the disturbing experiences she had suffered. I did not ask her again whether she trusted me. The kiss she gave me before I got into my carriage was both impulsive and satisfying. I stood at the open window and waved to her and she waved back. Little did I suspect then the adventure in realism she was to produce for me.

But realism was with me on that journey. It was high time that I got back into harness and attended to the financial aspects of my world. I had two good ladies waiting for me to put them upon canvas, Lady Mallaby and Mrs. Sanchia Maldano. My first choice would be Lady Mallaby, corpulent, comfortable, a retiring woman in middle age and a kind of swarthy and benign Hebraic richness.

Then, Horwood and The Meadows. How could one rid the county of such a neighbour, a fellow who would pour filth over any woman who refused his favours? I am afraid I am most un-modern in my make-up. The glib, smart, and impudent cads of the new world who reverence nothing but their own

cynical realism leave me gasping like some fool boy. I do not like cold, pert, sneering young gentleman to whom a kind of intellectual retort is the sole-response to life's anger. As I sat and contemplated the Horwood problem, I could picture the alert and promiscuous young sniggering at me. Had I not been about in the world ? Did I not know my Buda and Vienna, Paris and pubs, and night clubs, and the seething sex-mess under crowded dance floors. The morals of the cock-tail bar ! Was I such a sop as to believe that any woman who had known that world believed in restraint and fastidiousness and had any ideals higher than a pair of new silk stockings ? Well, I was that sort of fool, and sometimes the credulous are wiser than the cynics.

But -- Horwood ? If Hurtfield was to be our home, with a loveable little thing like Rita playing in its garden, then The Meadows was more than a superfluity. It would have to be spayed off the slate.

But -- how ?

III

Bill met me at Abbotsbridge and I was glad of Bill. Like some fresh-faced countryman he experienced other realities, some of the simpler variations of the wholesome human soil. I was back in my beloved Surrey, a Surrey that is still described by those who do not know it as a " stockbroker's preserve."

" Shall I drive, sir ? "

" Yes, Bill."

I saw him glance at my hands. I had shed the bandages two days ago.

" Any news, Bill ? "

He grinned at me.

" They say the gent is still in bed."

“ And how is trades ? ”

“ Bit of a slump, sir, if you ask me. Worst weekend they’ve had, sir.”

“ I’m not shedding tears over that.”

IV

Hurtfield once more, green and gracious and memorable. The old home had a new feeling for me. She had slept here, and the perfume of her presence seemed to pervade it.

After dinner, I sat down and wrote to Lady Mallaby. She and Sir Theodore lived less than fifteen miles away in an old Georgian home at the foot of the Downs. I apologised for the delay and told her that if she still wished me to paint her portrait, the pleasure would be mine. I could do the work at Hurtfield, or come to her if she preferred it.

I went out and posted the letter and on my way back I strolled in through the gates of The Meadows. Not a car, and not a soul to be seen in the garden. No blare from the bar. I began to wonder whether the damned place would die of inanition.

V

I received two letters on that particular morning, and one of them was a registered letter from St. Mawes.

I opened it, and found my envelope and the notes I had slipped into a bag.

Robert -- my dearest.

This is a gesture which I wish to make.

Perhaps you will understand. I have a job.

I can finance the interlude.

Rita sends you a kiss -- that is not on the cheek.

Mine is like hers.

Isolda

So, she had a job ! What kind of job ? And why this mystery ? I was puzzled and yet somehow pleased. I liked and loved the spirit of her. I put those five pound notes aside as treasure to be preserved.

The other letter was from Lady Mallaby. It was like her stout and comely self -- friendly and humorous. She would drive over to see me on the Friday, and I could paint an old frumps face and omit the lip-stick. Yes, Lady Sarah was the one person whom it would be a pleasure to paint in my mood of the moment.

VI

Jimmy rang up about lunch time. Could he come down on the Sunday ? He could, and very much so ! I had a story to tell Jimmy Slaughter.

On the Friday, Lady Sarah arrived about eleven in the morning with a

woman chauffeuse driving the Rolls. I was sitting in the garden and I went to meet her as she waddled across the grass. She was about five feet high and immensely fat, and an essential kindliness radiated from her handsome old face. She had been a very good friend to me in my early days and one could tease each other like girl and boy.

“ I’ve brought luck with me, Dan.”

She had always called me Dan, and I kissed her.

“ Not so Danish these days.”

She gave me a questioning look.

“ Is that so ? Do stubborn bachelors ever repent ? ”

I laughed.

“ As a matter of fact -- they do.”

“ How exciting ! Is it news yet ? ”

“ Not quite. And I’m not quite so conceited as I was.”

“ Were you ever conceited ? ”

“ Well, wasn’t I ? ”

“ Perhaps there was justification.”

The lady driver arrived with a considerable hamper, and I took it from her.

“ Rather capacious -- for two ? ”

“ A few extras in it.”

There were. I never knew a woman who left so much behind her both in the spirit and the flesh. The Mallaby’s possessed a farm and they had many friends in the U.S.A. and the Colonies. I saw my lady into a long chair and then delivered the basket into Betty’s hands. We opened it. A chicken, a dozen eggs, and a tin of Spam, some butter, and a punnet full of blackthorn plums.

Betty’s eyes goggled.

“ Gracious ! ”

I said, "I presume you can produce a lunch for the lady, Betty?"

"Can I not!" said she.

VII

I put in an hour's work before lunch, and my lady was easy to render. She was so much a person, in face and figure and temperament, that it was like paining a character out of Dickens. There have been occasions when arid and colourless sitters have so frustrated me that I have felt puckish about the business, and gone off on my own -- so to speak -- and produced a glorified edition of a very dull book. The dear ladies had expressed themselves delighted with the illusions, but I rather fancy that severe critics -- with no comprehending mischief in them -- would have classed me among the commercial humbugs.

We talked. I allowed favoured sitters to talk, and as a matter of fact it would have required an avalanche to submerge Lady Sarah in silence. She had observed The Meadows, and was interested. She was like a big and healthy child in her curiosities.

"Rather useful, Dan, as an emergency eating house."

I saw no reason why I should not tell her about Mr. Harold Horwood and his house, and I did so, but I kept Isolda out of the picture.

"What a nasty person, my dear. Not very nice for you with -- that -- almost on your doorstep."

"Oh, well, I have had some satisfaction out of it."

"Just how?"

"We differed rather considerably upon a certain matter and he came across to beat me up. I enjoyed it. I believe he is still in bed."

Her eyes were crinkles of light.

"How lovely! I wish I have been here, Dan. There are so many foul

fellows who don't get thrashed."

I could divine other curiosity in her, for, as I have said, she was as interested in life as a child outside a toy shop window.

So, Mr. Robert Byron was proposing to shed his celibacy. And who and what was the lady? I could feel her curiosity seething in her fat and voluble self and it amused me. I did not resent it. She was olive oil and butter in an acid and fatless world. But feeling puckish -- I held her off till the luncheon break and then I showed her two portraits, Isolda and her child.

Many people had been fooled by Lady Sarah in labelling her just a jocund old Jewess, but I was wise as to her flair for things. She was an expert pianist, and no woman had a quicker eye for a picture and its insinuations. I busied myself in cleaning up some brushes while she examined those two portraits.

"Excellent, Dan. You must have been in the mood."

"I was."

"Sentiment -- involved?"

"Rather so. I hope to persuade her to marry me."

She turned her kind, quizzical eyes on me.

"The child is included?"

"I hope so."

"She looks a lovely little thing."

"She is."

"And the daughter of the mother?"

"Very much so."

She was silent for a moment.

"A widow. Well, my dear -- there is something to be said -- for experience. May I know her name?"

"Isolda Mallory."

"How Arthurian ! You must bring them both to see us some day."

I made her a little bow.

"Thank you, Lady Sarah. You are rather good for people who need countenance and kindness. She -- has needed both."

And I armed her across the garden and into lunch.

VIII

Jimmy came down by car on the Sunday and he was not his usual sweet self. Some promoter fellow who was to have staged his next fight had played a dastardly trick on him and James was not a man to forgive tricksters.

"Gosh, I want to kick something."

How little did we foresee that the chance was to be both his and mine !

He had driven his car round to the back of the house and we sat on the lawn and I told him about Horwood. Jimmie's smile began to come back. And what had been the provocation ?

I hesitated and then I told him.

He grinned at me, and put out a big paw.

"Gosh. I must smoke half a pipe on this. Silly me, I've left it in the car."

He strolled off whistling, nor had he been gone ten seconds when two figures appeared round the curve of the wall, Horwood and a friend. I sat up. One glance at the strange gentleman's face was revealing. I have never seen a more truculent looking plug-ugly. Horwood's jaw was strapped, and when he spoke his voice seemed to rumble.

"Good morning, Mr. Byron. I have a friend here who is dying to meet you."

I got on my feet, and looked into the ugly eyes of that professional slugger.

“ Delighted -- I’m sure. The better the day, the better the deed.”

There were to be no gentlemanly preliminaries. Mr. Plug-Ugly came sailing at me like a bull at a gate and then I saw a sudden and strange change come over his face. If ever a blackguard looked shocked -- he did. His fists fell. He stood and stared.

I turned and saw Jimmy.

I said, “ Oh, James, let me introduce Mr. Harold Horwood and a friend. I gather than the friend is here to do what Mr. Horwood failed to do. And -- on -- a Sunday too ! ”

James came dancing across the grass. He was grinning. He addressed Mr. Plug Ugly.

“ Good morning, Buck. Haven’t met for a long time, have we ? I’m feeling like punching a sack of filth. Put ‘em up.”

I saw the fellow’s fawning face, and the propitiating smirk on it.

“ I’ve no quarrel with you, Mr. Slaughter.”

“ Is that so ? Well, I’m doing the quarrelling.”

And Jimmy sailed into him.

There was no fight in the fellow. He just tried to dodge or block Jimmie’s blows. I walked up to Horwood.

“ Nice idea of yours, Horwood. I can’t very well lick you again, but I can still kick.”

He looked savage and sick and I think a little scared of me. Meanwhile, Jimmy had floored Mr. Plug Ugly and the fellow was sitting on the grass, holding his jaw.

“ Thanks, James. I think we might take this business up with the police. Trespass and attempted assault.”

Jimmy laughed.

“ Need we ? Get up Buck. Only a minute or two ago I was telling Mr. Byron that I wanted to kick something, and you are just it for kicking.”

The fellow started crawling away from us, and then lumbered up and bore into a charging run. Jimmy was after him like a dog after a cat. I saw his leg swing and his foot make contact and you could hear the thud. The example seemed so provoking to me that I did the same to Horwood. In fact, we propelled both these blackguards to the gate in that hearty and fashion and then stood with our arms linked, watching them make for The Meadows. Mr. Plug Ugly was holding his backside.

Isolda's Diary

Three lovely days. We were sitting on the grass below the Castle when I spoke to him of the money he had slipped into my bag. I had sent Rita to pick flowers. I had the money ready in the same envelope and I asked him to take it back.

He did not want to, and I blurted out a silly protest, and I said I was not for sale.

That hurt him, and he asked if I had not yet realised that he was not that sort of cad.

So, I took the money back and said I would keep it on trust.

We dine with Morseleys. I took to them both and particularly to her. He has the American vitality and drive and my Austrian blood and her Polish seem to mix and we share the Continental flavours of our temperaments. She is kind and comely and reposeful and also she has a child. I feel that I can make a friend of Mrs. Morseley and I may need a friend if my plan for the next few months takes shape.

I talked to Robert of what I called our "Interlude," and he understood me.

It is not that I want to prove him, but myself.

One can rush into happiness, or ascend to it with a kind of secret reverenceness, like climbing the Scala Sancta at Rome.

Another letter from Isolda. She tells me that she is happy in her new job, but she does not tell me what it is. Now -- why? Almost I can divine a Botticelli smile, and a little mystery behind her reticence.

I find myself jumping from past to present, and vice versa, but in my next letter to her I do not ask her to be more explicit, perhaps because I suspect her of studied playfulness. Or, is she putting me to the proof?

Lady Sarah is with me every other day. I catch her regarding me with a kind of whimsical curiosity. Now -- why? Is there something about me which moves her to kind and secret laughter? Am I -- the notable bachelor who has been somewhat pestered and pursued, rather piquing to her as the pursuer?

The portrait was going well, and was pleasing me, but as yet I had not asked Lady Sarah for her opinion, but on the fourth day I did so.

"Is it -- pleasing to you?"

We were enjoying an interlude, and she sat on the sofa and smoked a cigarette. There was mischief in her very expressive eyes.

"I rather think, dear Dan, that there is a new subtlety in your method."

"New method! I'm afraid I'm not conscious of anything very new."

"Oh -- sweet innocence!"

Her eyes were flirtatious, but I took her seriously.

"What exactly are you suggesting?"

"A new approach, my dear."

"To what?"

"The esoteric inwardness of woman."

I had lit a pipe. I walked across and looked at my work. Were there any manners in my method? Surely -- I -- as a craftsman should know? Well, perhaps the face I saw had something more luminous about it, a kind of

human, inward glow.

“ Well, I’m just a little puzzled.”

“ Is the inspiration so sub-conscious ? ”

And then I think I began to see the light.

“ You mean ---- ? ”

“ You are paining, my dear, like a man -- in love.”

Perhaps.

Yes, perhaps I was.

II

I had heard myself described by one of my contemporaries as “ A likeable lout with a large fist full of crude colour, whose person was more pleasing to women than the daubs he made of them.” But the gentleman who had lifted a satirical leg over me, one of those poor devils, who are angry with life because life and woman had passed him by.

My Lady Sarah diagnosis piqued me, about as much as the witticism Bill brought home from the local pub.

“ The government’s like a bunch of bananas. They started life green, turned yellow and all of them are crooked.”

But I could poke fun at myself, even though I was piqued and puzzled or because of it. Had I appeared so green to the world of woman, a man and his craft lacking a certain ripeness ? And what was Isolda feeling about it ? Was she playing a game of blind-mans buff with me and waiting for me to remove the bandage ?

I too was provoked to play. When I had completed Lady Mallaby’s portrait, I became conscious of a boyish sentimentalism. I rang up St. Mawes, and asked for Morseley.

A girl’s voice answered me.

" Ship's Castle. Who's that -- please ? "

" Mr. Robert Byron. Can I speak to Mr. Morseley ? "

" I'm afraid Mr. Morseley is out, Mr. Byron."

" Is Mrs. Morseley in ? "

" No, I'm afraid not. Can I help you ? "

" You can. I'm wondering if you can put me up again for a few days."

" Hold a moment, please."

I cannot say just why I sensed a certain stickiness in the situation. I could hear faint babble of voices as though some argument was in progress. I supposed that the office was in a conference on and possible reservation. What is more, I caught the last words of a conversation which seeped into the phone and which I was not expected to hear.

" All right, I'll tell him that."

" Hello."

" Yes."

" It will have to be The Idle Rock, Mr. Byron."

" Never mind -- I shall be idle."

A pleasant giggle was the response to the poor piece of persiflage.

" We can take you on the Friday, Mr. Byron. Shall we arrange for a car to Troro ? "

" Please."

II

September is a month that delights me in its stillness and maturity. Like some placid Ceres wandering at will over the fields that have given of their golden grain. I had written to Isolda, warning her of my visit, and I will confess that I hoped to see her on the Troro platform, but there was no Isolda either on the platform or in the waiting car. Joe gave me a kind of

whimsical look as though he was hiding a piece of humour up his sleeve.

“ Well, Joe, how’s everybody ? ”

“ Fine, sir.”

“ Had a good season ? ”

“ So-so, sir. Nothing to grouse about.”

“ You are not much given to grouching, Joe.”

“ Nothing to grouse about, if it comes to that, sir.”

It was one of those golden mornings which September lavishes upon those who love her. We were the only car to cross the ferry, and the high woods and the water was gloriously still. We chugged across and took the steep hill smoothly. I lay back and felt good. This Cornish country was the very background for my playful mood, and any contact that might begin had the pleasant provocation of surprise. Though I didn’t know what Isolda’s job was, I could suppose that the work had kept her at St. Mawes.

So, we came to the hill above castle and I saw the familiar scene spread below me, the wayward water and the sleek hills and the woods, colour, glamour, a profound peace.

The sea-front was almost empty. We slid down past the little house and the garden, the harbour and the white “ Ship and Castle.” We drew up outside “ The Idle Rock ” and the first person I saw was Morseley. He might have been waiting there for me and his bright eyes seemed even brighter than usual. It was as though he had a joke to share with me.

We exchanged the very obvious remarks that men do on such occasions. The porter collected my two suitcases. I paid Joe, and said goodnight to him.

“ I am afraid we have had to put you on the top floor, Mr. Byron. And it’s a small room.”

“ No noises overhead. But are we being rather formal ? ”

He gave me a glittering grin.

"Reception is so -- important."

"Say you. They don't always do it well in England."

I followed the porter upstairs. My room was at the top end of a corridor, and its window was like the window of a ship with the sea below it.

"Will this do, sir?"

"Very much so."

He carried my cases in, and I tipped him and he closed the door.

Most certainly my room was on the small size for a large man, and the word *bijou* might have been applied to it, but it was colourful, simple and clean, and quite unfussed. I leaned out of the open window as though to smell the rocks and the sea and to savour the beauty of it all. I decided to unpack before dinner. I could go up to the Payellys after dinner.

I was laying out a pair of blue silk pyjamas when I heard footsteps in the corridor. Someone knocked.

"Come in."

The door opened and a voice said, "Do you take early morning tea, sir?"

Isolda -- Isolda in pale green uniform, demure, unsmiling, and very much the chamber maid.

I sat down on the bed.

"Yes, please. Is seven too early?"

"No, sir."

We looked at each other and I saw the smile beginning in her eyes. I got up. I edged round the bed. I put one hand on her shoulder and drew her in, and with the other hand I closed the door.

"So -- this -- is your job."

She looked straight into my eyes.

"Yes. It is clear and good."

I nodded.

"And -- how?"

" Oh, they were in a jam here. Two girls left suddenly. I -- err -- they have been so kind to me."

I put an arm round her. I drew her to the window.

" Most improper -- this, a visitor getting fresh with one of the staff. Well, never mind -- I like your frock."

Her eyes were still on mine. She seemed to be looking right into me, deep inside me, and I think I understood.

" Still deigning to wear the ring ? "

She raised a hand, and I saw it on her finger.

" Do you wish me to keep it ? "

" Do I wish you to keep it ! What is all this, an experiment in realism ? "

She touched my tie, and her eyes left mine.

" Do -- celebrated artists consort with ---- ? "

I took her up.

" Chambermaids ? In this case the answer is very much in the affirmative. May I kiss you, Isolda ? "

Her eyes came back to mine.

" Wait. You know everything -- now ---- "

" I know a great deal more about myself -- and woman -- since I met you. So, may I kiss you ? "

She put up her face to mine, and I held her close.

" Do you remember how you snubbed me -- that first day ? "

Her head was on my shoulder.

" Don't you know why ? "

" I think I can guess."

" I know more now. Oh, my dear, how I have wanted to believe in someone."

I kissed her hair. Here was the one creature in the world for me -- a creature who I could never hurt.

I said, " Can I come up and see Rita presently ? "

She lifted her face to me.

“ Yes. I think -- Rita ---- ”

“ Well, what ? ”

“ You must be unhappy about -- our having her ? ”

“ I shall not. Some people, and little things like Rita make life seem notably good.”

She clung to me for a moment.

“ I must go now. I have the beds to turn down.”

I laughed and let her go.

“ May I say one thing. I think you are the most fascinating chambermaid I have ever ---- ”

She turned at the door, and there was laughter in her eyes.

“ Thank you, sir. You shall have your tea punctually at seven.”

IV

The Morseleys were dining in the hotel, and I asked if I might join them.

“ Why -- yes.”

I bent over madam's hand and kissed it, for there are certain hands which should be kissed, even though I caught a pert young person at another table smirking at me. I suppose that in the casual, pinch my backside world, old courtesies are mere fantastic froth. I sat down and smiled at the Morseleys, and they smiled back at me and our smiles had other meanings. So had our conversation. It might have sounded muddled and meaningless to our neighbours.

“ I hope your room is as you like it, Bryon ? ”

Almost I winked at him.

“ Absolutely, and the service provided.”

I gave Madame a little bow.

"And the kindness provided for other people."

"I wondered whether you would be shocked."

"I was. Delightfully so. My early tea is to come to me punctually at seven thirty. I think it is rather unusual for mere man to be served by his -- betrothed."

She gave me a questioning look and for the moment I felt in the witness-box.

"May I add, Madame, that I revere some of the dignity of life's decor. Handsome is as handsome does."

Her eyes crinkled with light.

"You -- are -- rather a handsome person, Mr. Byron."

Again, I gave her a little bow.

"Much less so that I need to think. There may be a certain ceremony -- in the near future. St. Just in Roseland is the kind of inevitable place. Perhaps you will allow the after-celebration to happen here."

Morseley's eyes were full of laughter and his subsequent gesture was just like his eyes -- sparkling. He called to the waiter.

"Pretio, a bottle of the Veuve Clicquot."

Champagne! I divined the bristling interest of our neighbours. As to the commotion that I had passed it must have sounded to them like crackling nonsense and I, a flâneur who liked pedantic posing.

Isolda's Diary

I told him in a letter that I had a job -- but not what it was, and I could laugh to myself over the situation. In these chaotic years, the pay for the job seems to be in inverse proportion to the experience and skill required. Largesse included, my present occupation would probably produce for me an income double that of many authors and artists and young scientists. Mrs. Morseley is in on the secret and we can laugh over it together.

Most men are such snobs, even the brainy ones. Perhaps creative craft is less productive of snobbery.

Well, well, well he is coming to The Idle Rock ! I overheard Joan Dampier in the office doing a delightful giggle over the reservation. Nice child - Joan, and incorrigibly romantic. We three women might appear in The Wives of Windsor, but there would be no man on the stage like my Robert.

And what does Rita think of it all, especially of my chic, yet austere uniform ? Somehow, thank God, there does not seem to be anything of the little snob in Rita. She likes going out with Peter in his boat and the sea is not snob stuff.

Robert writes to me every day. He is at work again and painting Lady Mallaby. Will these great ladies accept me ? Well, for his sake, I can cultivate décor.

He tells me about that Horwood incident, and accepts it as a supreme jest. I do not. I have a feeling that the beast is still dangerous. Think heaven Mr. James Slaughter happened to be there. I could kiss Jimmy Slaughter.

And The Meadows appears to be a flop. What a blessing ! As Robert says -- Hurtfield and The Meadows are incompatibles, and The Meadows will have

to revert to the conventions.

I am to have a home, my first home, and what a home ! I go about singing to myself.

He is coming today.

He is here.

He is in his room -- unpacking.

I go and knock at his door.

"Come in."

I open the door.

"Do you take early morning tea, sir ?"

He plays up for a moment, and then I see the smile beginning in his eyes. He gets up, draws me in and closes the door.

"So -- this -- is the job."

I tell him how it all happened.

He says, "Most improper -- this, a visitor getting fresh with one of the staff. I like your frock."

He raises my hand and looks at the ring. He kisses my hand, a chambermaid's hand.

After that gesture did matter to me what we said to each other ?

St. Mawes was idling in the glow of that September evening, sitting at open doors, or leaning on the sea-wall, or just strolling with sunset and sea spread for the blessing of man. I had lit a pipe, and I too was leaning against the sea wall with my back to it and watching for Isolda. One or two old salts in blue jeans passed the time of day with me, and I could feel the friendliness of this little place now that the alien world had vanished.

I had asked Mrs. Morseley one last question.

“ When does -- she -- come off duty ? ”

“ About half past seven, Mr. Byron.”

The I saw her. She came out by way of the hotel entrance, still wearing her official frock and carrying a little knitted bag. The evening sunlight seemed to set her hair alight. She paused, looked, saw me, and smiled.

I went to meet her. I put out my hand for the bag.

“ May mere man bear burdens ? ”

She let me take the bag and we walked together to the steep steps beside the “ Ship and Castle.” I knew that St. Mawes was watching us, with curiosity and perhaps with kindness, for Isolda was part of the working world, and so -- in a sense -- was I. It was only when we climbed the steps and came to the steep lane that I realised that she was tired, for there was a languor in her movements. I wanted to put an arm round her, but somehow I was shy.

“ Tired, darling ? ”

“ Just a little.”

She had been on her feet all day and it had been a day of double duty. I discovered that later. I glanced at her shoes, and they looked rather old and worn.

"Kind people -- the Morseleys."

"They have been lovely to me."

"But you helped them in a crisis."

"And it was help to me."

We were mounting the lane, and I could see the white cottages, and a child hanging over a gate. She saw us, and swinging the gate open, came running with arms spread.

"Oh, Uncle Bob ! "

I picked her up and kissed her on her little freckled nose.

"What a funny place to kiss me."

I laughed.

"Not adequate, say ? How's that ? "

She gave me a hearty one, and I turned and looked at her mother.

"Blessed by the innocent. She'll have the lads worried some day."

Isolda smiled at us both.

"She ought to be in bed."

The Payellys were sitting in their little garden, and I shall never forget the comprehending courtesy of this Cornish couple. Peter gave Isolda his chair, and Rita climbed into her lap and gave me mischievous glances. We chatted for a minute or so, and then Mary Payelly got up. She said that they were strolling up the hill to see a new baby, and they left us in the garden and the chairs. I understood and I blessed them.

I took the other chair, and Rita slid down and climbed on my knees. She looked up at me solemnly and asked me a child's candid question.

"Why do you come here so often, Uncle Robert ? "

I laughed.

"Guess, Miss Curiosity."

She crinkled up her nose at me.

"You must like somebody."

"I do," said I, "you for example."

"And -- Mummy?"

My eyes met her mother.

"Yes, I think your mother the most wonderful woman in the world."

II

I woke early. I washed and shaved, and I was sitting at the window trying to read a book which I had brought with me. It was a most depressing book by one of the very analytical, Freudian gang, brilliant with gloom and scepticism. I think it was literature such as this that made me realize how lost, was the present generation, bewildered and wandering in a wilderness of words. Words, words, words, gabble in the air, no melody in the mind. I laid the book down, and looked at the Cornish scene. It had magic for me, like some of the Hurtfield dawns and sunsets. I recalled a winter picture that had for me the wonder of a child, a setting moon and Venus hanging in the bracken of a winter walnut tree like a star on the forehead of mystery. The grass would be so subdued that it looked like frost and out yonder, Merlin raised a black hand as though beckoning in the dawn.

Then I heard her knock.

"Come in."

I stood up and smiled at her and she smiled back.

"Where will you have it?"

"Here -- by the sea and sky."

I removed the book from the stool and she placed the tray upon it. I did not attempt to touch her.

"Thank you, Isolda."

I saw her glance at the book.

"Baffled, my dear."

"I've read it, or tried to. I must go. Everybody wants tea between seven and eight."

I said, "I think I shall have to consult you about this book, 'The Years That Are Dead.' It's much too psycho-analysed for me. I think I must be a rather simple sort of soul."

She said a thing that surprised me.

"Thank God ---- for that."

She was to give me other surprises. The Morseleys had managed to raise more help, and Isolda and Rita and I were to share the afternoon together. We hiked up past the castle and down the path to the wild grassland, and sat there in the sun. The estuary and Falmouth lay over yonder, and I thought of Flushing and all the old sea-captains who had dwelt there when they were not bringing tea-clippers in a race from the East. The pattern of life must have been more plain for these, God-fearing men with a simple faith in things that were eternal.

I said to Isolda, "So you have read that book. What did you make of it?"

Rita was wandering about in search of blackberries and Isolda was watching her.

"Everything that is not -- that."

"The child?"

"Yes. The young are so very old. Not the very young. That's the one thing that has kept me -- sane, trying to give her some faith and trust in something."

I reached for her hand.

"You have. It's a happy little face."

Her fingers closed on mine. She began to speak almost like some oracular creature out of the past, and I sat and listened and the spell of her was upon me. Woman was speaking, women who had seen honour and faith and

loyalties go down in ruin, women who had seen butchering and heartlessness and the lewd lechery of man. And I was shocked and filled with profound compassion. I was like some simple boy listening to the words of Mother Spirit speaking of what had been and what was, blindness, fear and a kind of horror of the mere flesh. Man was wallowing in a dreadful materialism and finding in it nothing but mud and nausea.

I was astonished, yet strangely exultant. How much had I divined in her and how little ! She seemed to glow beside me. She was the eternal mystery manifesting to me in the flesh and in the spirit.

I raised her hand and kissed it.

“ You make me feel humble, Isolda.”

“ Humble, dear man ? No need for that.”

“ It’s a good feeling, what we need.”

She was watching the child.

“ If only the world could get back to -- that. If it could go on its knees to something.”

“ A new vision ? But where and how ? ”

She was silent for some seconds and almost her profile was fierce in its emotional concentration. Her hand still held mine as though the contact helped her.

“ I have had to try and make myself believe in something. Yes, just for her and something in myself. Otherwise ---- Oh, well, can a man understand ? ”

“ I can. You have had to fight.”

“ Have I not ! A cheap world just wants you to be cheap. You see, I was a happy child. I believed in people and things, and then ---- Need I go over all that again ? To find that you have given yourself and been fooled and treated like a tart.”

That made me fierce in my tenderness towards her. I had an arm round her

now.

"Never use that word again to me Isolda. By God -- yes -- one has to believe. Do you know, my dear, I think there is something deep down in me which does believe in something which alludes mere words. The old world always has believed -- though some of their gods may seem strange to us. Maybe -- our modern scepticism is a testing and a challenge."

She sat very still leaning against me.

"Oh -- let's believe, let's be children or mad fanatics. Happy are those who still have faith. I feel I must believe."

"We're not alone, my dear. The trouble is that the world is too slick and clear to get down on its knees before the eternal mystery."

She turned her face and kissed me.

"Thank you, comrade and dearest of men. How you have helped me, you do not know."

And then we saw Rita running to us, carrying a small handkerchief in the shape of a bag.

"I've found some, Mommy. I picked them for you."

She opened the improvised bag in her mother's lap, and a dozen or so blackberries lay there. I saw Isolda's face go all shimmery.

"Thank you, darling."

To me it seemed that God was back in his Heaven, and that Christ's words might have come to me out of the September sky.

III

How some experiences can clarify the fortune for one. I had been bothered in considering the mess that was The Meadows -- a kind of human cesspool just across the road. Also, I will confess to having felt worried about future finance, and my profession in a world that was being bled to

death. Suddenly all that passed. I could laugh in the face of the future, for -- I -- man had been challenged by a woman's courage and the tragedy it had transcended.

What a comrade was this go to though life with !

I could talk to her quite calmly about things.

How long was the interlude to last, and then would she marry me ?

She said, " These dear people have been kind to me. I should like to go on helping till the season is over."

I approved of that. I told her that I should like her to be married to me in the old church of St. Just in Roseland and that Rita could play bridesmaid. Afterwards, we could celebrate with the Morseleys at one of the two hotels. Which was it to be ? She chose " Idle Rocks."

She could even laugh over this.

" There have been times when I have been on the rocks, dear man."

" Symbolism, and I am playing Tristan to Isolda."

Then I spoke of Hurtfield and that other house across the way. Hurtfield should make a happy home for the child, but -- somehow The Meadows would have to be blotted out. I was not going to have a septic cad like Horwood camped on our doorstep.

She said, " That world no longer frightens me."

IV

We spoke of other things, or rather I did. I had saved some money, about twenty thousand pounds and I told her that I should settle half of it on her -- yes -- a Deed of Gift which should place the capital at her services. My feeling about it was that a woman and a wife should have resources of her own, and not have to scrape it out of household expenses or plead for pocket-money.

That seemed to touch her more than anything I had said or done.

“ I’ll earn it, my dear man ? ”

“ Earn it ? ”

“ Yes, I hope so. I may have to play cook, you know. I am quite a good cook.”

I laughed and kissed her.

“ And -- chamber maid ! -- Well, -- I dare say I could be useful about the house, especially when it is home.”

That raised the problem of Bill and Betty and I pondered it on the way home. It seemed to me that complete candour was the thing and a straight human appeal to two very human people. Betty and Bill had a part of the home to themselves, and it would continue to be theirs and if they could continue to regard that as home there need be no clash.

I put it to them that evening. I called them into the parlour and made them sit down and gave each a glass of sherry.

I said, “ I am going to be married, and my wife has a child. You have been good friends to me, and the choice is yours, my dears. You may want to go or wish to stay. I think you can love the child, and I think someone else is rather loveable. Think it over.”

I saw them look at each other and smile. It was Bill who spoke. He raised his glass to me.

“ Here’s happiness, sir. Speaking for myself, I’ve been happy here. What about you, Betty ? ”

She sat solemnly with her hands folded in her lap.

“ If Bill’s happy, so am I, sir.”

And that was that.

V

Bill had other news for me. The Meadows had had the worst week-end since its opening, and it was more than rumour that for two days Horwood had been completely sizzled. Moreover, austerity and the dollar shortage was promising to bring such county adventures down to mother earth. It was more than probable that basic petrol would be withdrawn and with private cars off the road, The Meadows custom could hardly be adequate. Of course, Horwood's richer patrons could wrangle or go in for hire service, but to an enterprise that was tottering, this might prove the last push.

Strolling in the Hurtfield garden with its September serenity and autumn decor I even forgave old Potter his passion for dahlias. These great, saucy, wenches and the Michaelmas daisies were flaunting all over the borders, and in the old orchard, apples were thick on the trees. We had a cellar in which some of the late keepers lived till the following June and every week old Potter would look them over lovingly. Incidentally he had apples every weekend for Sunday pie.

The Mallaby cheque had reached me, and very welcomingly so. I was going out to post an acknowledgement and also a letter to Mrs. Maldano when I ran into Horwood. He also was going to the post. The fellow looked raddled and turgid, his red cheeks swollen and there were pouches under his bleary blue eyes. We ignored each other and yet walked almost side by side to the pillar box. He was just a little ahead of me, and as he turned away after slipping two or three letters into the box, he spat these sudden words to me.

" Well, Mr. Byron, how's the new tart ? "

Strangely enough I had no urge to hit him. Maybe -- my last day with Isolda and the child had put me above such beastliness. With deliberation, I slipped the two letters into the box.

I said, " Tell me, Horwood, just why did you grow into such an evil brute ?
Were you born that way, or ---- ? "

He snarled at me over a fat shoulder.

" Nice, bloody fool, aren't you ? "

My answer was, " It may be better to be a little foolish than completely
foul."

That was all that passed between us. I followed a few yards behind him as
he laboured along on his lobster legs. His bun-head looked sunken
between his shoulders, and his greasy black hair needed cutting. All the
oily arrogance seemed to have gone out of him, and I got the feeling that he
and his Country Club were finished so as I was concerned.

I was wrong.

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Iaols was writing to me daily and I to her. I am an indifferent letter writer, often I have marvelled at the prolixity and persistence of the Victorian on paper. Was it that they had more leisure and more to say ? More leisure -- certainly, but we who are ever crowded are exhorted and shouted out -- have become like mute bored children in a over-crowded school class. There is much that we could say, but in this age of gabble, silence may be more soothing, like some old church yard where the dead be at peace and are not disturbed by the rumble and rattle of modernity. Big Ben booms, even in the wireless. Mr. Beven and Mr. Shinwell blare like brass-bands. We are told to do all the things that yesterday we were told not to do. The Ministry of Food instructs me how to cook without fat, and to persuade potato cakes to appear in fancy dress. I may listen to German music on the wireless, but when some hired prig becomes informative, I say " Shut up " and switch him off. Yes, I must confess that I am like the old house I live in, remote and serene and boringly satirical. I can imagine how Hurtfield might feel were a hundred bungalows to spring up around it.

Escapist ! -- say the moralists.

Does not one start to escape sometime from a world that is about as melodious and annoying as a pneumatic drill ?

II

Two days passed without a letter from Isolda and I wondered why. I suppose such silences are absurdly disturbing to a man in love, and about six o'clock I rang up the " Idle Rock." The girl in the office answered me. She was one of those gentle blondes.

Could I speak to Miss Mallory ? I had given my name and instantly she was helpful.

“ Of course, Mr. Byron. She’s in the hotel. I’ll find her.”

I had to wait less than a minute, and then I heard her voice.

“ Hello.”

“ Hello, darling. Everything all right ? ”

“ Yes, Robert.”

“ I haven’t had a letter for two days.”

“ No ? Why, I have written.”

“ They haven’t reached me yet. There is a poor fool of a postman here who muddles things up. I’ll look into it.”

We talked for another minute or two and the conversation was intimately ours. I gather that the nice girl had left Isolda alone with the telephone. I blessed her.

I told Bill about the missing letter and asked him to get hold of the particular postman -- if I did not catch him in person. It had occurred to me that one or both of Isolda’s letters might have been left at The Meadows by mistake, and that was the very thing I did not want. Horwood did not know her address and being what he was, I did not want him to know it.

I hung about for that postman and caught him on his morning round. He had only one letter for Hurtfield.

He was an amiable, jittering, stammering creature, and I was gentle with him.

“ Are you quite sure there wasn’t a letter for me yesterday ? ”

“ There was one, sir. I left it here.”

“ I’m afraid you didn’t.”

“ I can remember it, sir, because a blooming wasp stung me on the neck -- over there.”

“ So -- you did deliver letters at The Meadows ? ”

" I did, sir, several, and most of 'em looked like bills."

I let him go, but I was bothered. What with the sting of a sleepy wasp and his muddled mental ability, I felt certain that Isolda's letter had been in the batch he had delivered at Horwood's. The remedy was obvious. I strolled across to The Meadows. The place had a forlorn and deserted look. The porch paving had not been cleaned, and cigarette ends lay there. I rang the bell and a rather dirty looking waiter in his shirt sleeves and greasy black trousers came to the door.

" Is Mr. Horwood in ? "

He looked dumb and saucy.

" You'll find him in the office."

I walked in. The office door was ajar. I pushed it open and saw Horwood slumped in a chair behind his desk. He looked drugged and turgid. A whiskey bottle, a glass, and siphon decorated the desk.

" Good morning, Mr. Horwood. I rather think that a letter of mine has been left here by mistake."

He glared at me.

" No, it hasn't."

" Quite sure ? "

He belched at me, and his face was flushed and furious.

" Get out of here, damn you."

I eyed him steadily.

" Thank you for your nice manners. I rather believe you are lying."

He made as though to get up, but he was so razzled that he slumped back into his chair.

" Get out of here -- you blasted pup."

I felt grim, but I laughed.

" I should not try any more tricks, Horwood, or the pup may tear the breeches off you."

And I left him.

But I was pretty sure that he had had that letter and that he had opened it and it made me mad to think that he had read a letter that was hers and mine. It was like having one's intimate other self slobbered over by some foul and slimy thing. Moreover, he now knew her address and I had thought her secure and care-free in that corner of Cornwall.

I thought it right to warn her. I rang up again that evening and told her of the missing letter.

" My suspicions are that it went to The Meadows."

Her voice sounded to me as though the news had shocked her.

" Oh, Robert ! -- I hope not. I said things in it ---- "

" About him ? "

" No, about us."

" Don't worry, darling. I don't think he will try any more of his tricks. Remember, phone me, if anything should ever trouble you. I shall be down next week."

" Yes, please come."

" I will."

But again I was to be proved wrong in failing to forecast the devil of a beast had been thwarted and beaten up and who was drink maddened and I -- suspect -- rather desperate about the obvious failure of his so-called Country Club. He wanted to lash out, hurt those who had hurt him, and since he knew that he could not hurt me with his fists, he could wound me through her. There are some cruelties and obscenities which might seem beyond human credibility, such as the raping and strangling of some small girl. But, such horrors occur, and often a fool section of the public gets sentimental about the brute who -- poor fellow -- had been the victim of an unjust social scheme and could not be held responsible for his actions.

Hang him ? Oh -- no. That would be perpetuating yet another murder.

III

To my eternal regret I was not present when the thing happened, but I was able to send out a warning.

It was on the following morning that while shaving, I saw Horwood's red car take the road. Now -- whither? I could suppose that a spiv like Horwood had plenty of petrol or bought spare coupons, and that he could drive to the Lands End if he so chose. I called to Bill and told him to watch The Meadows gate and report if Horwood's red car reappeared. It did not and after breakfast I went across to The Meadows and my ring was answered by the same slovenly, dumb and saucy waiter.

"Mr. Horwood in?"

The fellow had opened the door just six inches.

"No, gone away," and he closed the door on me.

I went back and rang up "The Idle Rock," having warned Bill that I wanted him to rush me up to Paddington. We had sufficient petrol for that. There was some delay before a voice answered me and it was the voice of the gentle blond. I said that I was coming to St. Mawes, and could they put me up? Yes, the season was thinning out. And could I speak to Miss Mallory. I had the fidgets, and the exchange wanted to cut me off before I heard Isolda's voice.

"Robert speaking. Coming down tonight. Just a word of warning. It may be nothing, but a certain person has disappeared in his car."

"From The Meadows?"

"Yes, my dear. He has been drinking hard and is in a pretty ugly temper. I thought you ought to know."

"Oh, thank you, dear man. Do come quickly."

"I'll be with you tonight. Will you get Joe to meet me."

IV

Horwood must have driven like a lunatic on that September day. Certainly he had a fast car and a half drunk devil was at the wheel. He was even more drunk and devilish when he reached St. Mawes. Isolda had taken my warning seriously, and with strange prescience, had brought Rita down with her to the hotel. And this is what had happened. Horwood had parked his car in an open space of the pub close to the playground where there are swings for children. He had climbed up to the Payellys and with a kind of treacherous brazenness had asked for Miss Mallory. Mary Payelly, suspecting nothing, had told him that Miss Mallory was at the Idle Rocks and that she would not be home till seven.

Horwood had gone down and waited by the sea-wall close to the hotel. The tide was in and Peter Payelly himself had noticed him there, just as a local may notice a peculiar stranger. Peter had been halfway up the hill when he had heard that bawling voice and he had turned about and waited. Isolda and the child had come from the Idle Rocks to be confronted by this drink-maddened beast. He had followed them along the front and up the lane, shouting obscenities. Peter had passed them to me with an air of reluctance.

“There goes the harlot and her bastard. I’ve had her and she’s going to have another kid by me.”

He had kept on shouting and following them and people had come to their doors. I can picture that ghastly progress. Peter had put an end to it. He was one of those lithe and sinewy Celts with a strength that could be astounding when his temper was up. And his temper had flared when he had seen the faces of mother and child and that other face, drink sodden and furious. He had knocked Horwood flat on the cobbles of the lane and had

stood over him while mother and child had passed over to the white gate of the cottage.

V

A nice picture and hardly credible ! I must have arrived about half an hour after this pilgrimage of shame, and as we drew towards The Idle Rock, I spotted Horwood's car parked there. I left Joe to carry in my suitcase and I made straight for the Payelly's. I did not know then what I was to know in five minutes time, and I wondered at the number of open doors and at the way people looked at me.

Peter was waiting at the gate, a very grim Peter. I suppose he thought it best to get the beastly business over, and he told me what I have just recorded.

" Good God ! Where is the swine ? "

" Went down back of " Sea View ", when I let him up sir."

" I wish you'd killed him. I shall -- and where ---- ? "

" In the cottage with the child."

Mrs. Payelly opened the door to me, pointed to the stairs and nodded. I don't know whether she was woman-wise or even if I showed wisdom in going up, but mount those stairs I did. The door was closed and I opened it. I saw Isolda sitting on the bed with the child beside her. Her face was almost bloodless, frozen and strangely without expression. Almost it was a dead face.

I closed the door. It was the child who responded. She ran to me, put up her arms and I lifted her up and going to a chair by the window, sat her on my knees. I kissed her. Isolda did not speak, but looked at me with eyes that might have seen nothing.

" Oh, Uncle Bob, that horrid man ! "

I don't know how the inspiration came to me, but come it did. I made myself laugh.

"Why he was what we call drunk, darling and just didn't know what he was doing. You don't know what -- drunk -- is."

Her solemn little face looked up at me.

"No, Uncle Bob, but he -- shouted ---- "

"I know. He did not know what he was doing, Rita. When a silly man gets like that -- he's just silly. We don't take any notice of him."

She nodded at me solemnly.

"I don't want to see him again, Uncle Bob."

"You won't, darling. I can promise you that."

I glanced across at Isolda, and her face had come alive. She gave me a look I shall never forget. I rose, tossed Rita up in the air, and then gave her a playful kiss.

"Look after mother. I must go and unpack. See you again presently."

She threw her arms round my neck and hugged me.

I set her down, crossed to the bed, and put my lips to Isolda's forehead. She sat quite still, her hands in her lap.

"This is the end of the interlude, Isolda. I want you with me now and always."

I closed the door. I was half way down the stairs when the door opened and I heard her voice.

"Robert, oh, Robert, don't do anything ---- "

I turned and smiled at her.

"No, my dear. What you and I need is -- peace."

VI

I found Peter waiting for me, and I took him by the arm.

“ Peter, I shall want you.”

“ I’m here, sir.”

“ Can you get some stout fellow who can keep guard here ? ”

“ I can get my brother.”

“ Good man. Get him. I’ll wait.”

I went in and sat with Mary Payelly, and I said, “ Mary, I’ve come to believe in the devil. He inhabits some men.”

She amused me with strange gentleness.

“ I have always believed in the devil, sir, perhaps because I married a good man.”

It was growing dark now, but we sat on in the dark. Then I heard voices, and I went to the door. Peter was back with his brother Simon. We shook hands.

“ Simon, if that evil person should come back here, hit him for sure.”

Simon had a black beard. He grinned at me.

“ I’ll hit him to hell, sir.”

“ Good man. That’s where he should be.”

VII

Windows were alight now, doors shut. We went down the steep lane and the steps to the main street. We found Horwood’s car still there, its red body less red, but its cream wheels shining in the dark. It was empty. I had no torch, but a box of matches. I opened a door and struck a match. There was no luggage in the car, but I saw a half empty whiskey bottle on the seat beside the driver. I collected it, and threw it over the harbour wall into the sea.

I rejoined Peter.

“ We’ll wait here. I may have to wait all night.”

"What about the police, sir?"

"I'd rather keep the police out of it."

"Then -- I'm with you, sir. Had a meal?"

"Not yet."

"Go in and have a feed, sir. I'll keep an eye on things."

I went across to the Idle Rock, and the first person I met was Morseley. I think he had been waiting for me, for the report of that pilgrimage of shame must have spread over half the village. Yet, though his bright eyes scanned my face, he never mentioned it, for which I blessed him.

"Come and dine with us, Byron."

"Thanks. If you don't mind me rushing it. In a sort of sense, I'm on duty. I suppose that fellow did not come in here?"

"He did not."

"Nor the Ship & Castle?"

"No, or we would have thrown him out."

That was all that we said to each other, and when I joined them at their table, these two kind and comprehending people talked of anything on earth but the subject that must have been in the minds of all three of us. There are times when the kind and smiling face of a woman is comforting, a woman who could refrain from asking devastating questions. I think we did discuss the political scene, and the effects of the New Freedom upon those who were not permitted to be free. I drank nothing; excused myself from coffee, lit a pipe in the lounge, and went out to rejoin Peter.

I found another figure beside Payelly's -- P.C. White, the local constable, who was a friend of mine.

"Evening, officer."

"Evening, sir."

"No lights on the car, I'm afraid. Shall I switch 'em on?"

"Just as you please, sir. Do you want me to take notice?"

" I should be grateful, if you could leave it to us."

" I think I might, sir, provided ---- "

I nodded at him.

" Quite so. Thank God for a man in uniform who has human sense. But there is something you could do. "

" What's that, sir ? "

" Find out if the fellow has got in anywhere. Name of Horwood. Looks as though he has been drunk for days."

" I can do that, sir. This unlighted car's a good reason. Might be stolen."

" As I said -- officer, you're a man of sense."

VIII

That must have been one of the strangest nights I have experienced -- ever, stranger than some of the war memories of squatting in a slit trench, being bombed or mortared, waiting to attack through some orchard in Normandy. P.C. White came back later to say that he had visited all the hotels and pubs and could get no news of Horwood. Where was the brute ? Was he waiting to sneak back to his car and clean out, or might he be lying sogged on some corner ?

The lights of St. Mawes were out, people were in bed. The little place was soundless save for the wash of the sea. We strolled up and down, listened, smoked and about midnight I sent Peter up to the cottage to make sure that nothing had happened there. He came back to tell me that all was quiet and that Simon had dosed down on the parlour sofa.

I said, " Better turn in, Peter. I can manage."

But he would not leave me. Something of his Cornish fanaticism had been roused, for he was a God-fearing man like his father, and next day I was to bless him for having been with me. To make doubly sure, I removed the

distributor lead from Horwood's car by the light of a torch Peter had brought back with him. Most certainly I wanted to be rid of the savage, but he was not to vanish just as he pleased. As yet, I had not had my hands on him.

I don't know how many pipes we smoked that night. We sat in the car, strolled about, leaned on the seawall under the stars. To me -- there was something of old Homer and the Odyssey in the night's vigil, with sea, hills, and rocks that were as old as Time, and man a mystery to himself -- a stillness that was supreme. We could see the vague shapes of boats at their moorings, boats moving gently like cradles rocked by the faintest of swells, and all through those hours, I was listening for the footsteps of the man whom I lusted to kill.

I found myself talking to Payelly upon the of subject of God, though in the main he did most of the talking. With a kind of single profundity and in the language of the people and of a man who lived by the sea, he made his confession to me. His was the credo of generations who had gone down to the sea in ships. He was the sea. He had none of the arrogance and the self-assertive glibness of the modern man.

IX

So -- the dawn came. It spread in a gradual glow above the hills. The water passed from muffled blackness to live silver. I was tired and sleepy and I yawned. We had been sitting for the last hour in the abandoned car.

"I want to stretch my legs, Peter."

"Same here, sir."

I got out, stretched, yawned and saw colour coming back into the world.

"What about the tide, Peter?"

"Nearly full, sir."

His face looked grey and grim. He lit a pipe. I strolled to the sea wall, and saw below me a thing floating in the water.

“ Good God, Peter ! Come here.”

It was Horwood's body that had been washed into the shallows, floating half submerged, arms spread, face upturned and gently moving with the movements of the sea.

The dead eyes were open, and staring up at me, and that sinister black streak of hair kept stifling to and fro over his low forehead. It might have been alive, waving a mocking finger at me. Yes, damn the fellow, for even in death he could be more of a ghastly cur than when alive. The dead are final, and as I stood looking down at the thing, with Peter beside me, I realised what lay before Isolda. An inquest, the press, headlines in the daily papers. As if she had not suffered sufficiently without this tragedy.

I'll confess that I said, “ Damn the swine. Why the devil did he want to go and get himself drowned ? ”

Peter was leaning over the wall. I don't think it occurred to either of us that there was any chance of a rescue, or that we wished to make one.

“ Suicide, sir ? ”

“ I don't think so. The beast loved himself too well.”

“ Got razzled and tumbled in -- off the quay -- yonder.”

“ More than likely.”

And then that other word shot into my mind. Murder !

There was no pity in me, but I did realise that something had to be done about that fat bit of dead beast. The police. Better get the business completed before St. Mawes wakes up. Peter went off to look up P.C. White, and I walked up and down feeling like some angry creature in a cage. The thought of what it might all mean to Isolda exasperated me.

In ten minutes, Payelly was back with P.C. White, most unofficially

dressed in shirt and trousers. He and Peter unmoored a boat lying by the harbour steps, and paddling to the corpse, got a rope round it and towed it across to some rocks below the hotel. I scrambled down to give them a hand and the three of us managed to pull the body out of the water.

There was a bruise on Horwood's chin.

"Someone hit him," said P.C White.

"That was my mark -- I guess," said Peter.

"Turn him over."

We rolled the body over and there was a raw wound at the back of Horwood's head

"Look at that. Knocked into the sea."

I was aware of White giving an upward glance to me.

"But who?"

Payelly was rubbing his chin.

"Neither of us, White. We were together all though the night and never saw the fellow."

"Funny business."

Peter was still rubbing his chin.

"Not so funny. He was pretty drunk. Tide was low and he may have fallen off the quay and hit his head on a stone. Then the tide came in and finished him. Good business too -- I should say."

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During the last few minutes I had been realising that Isolda would have to be told and that it was I who should do the telling. It exasperated me that after she had to suffer that pilgrimage of shame, she now might have to stand up in a public and answer damnable questions. My anger was compassionate and protective and it seemed to give me the forthright impulse that I needed.

P.C. White was scribbling in a note-book that he had brought with him stuffed into the pocket of his trousers. He spoke to Peter.

"You get hold of Doctor Pen and some fellow to help carry the body in. I'm staying here."

"You won't want me."

"Well, sir ---- "

"I am going up to see Miss Mallory. She will have to be told after what happened yesterday."

White gave me a heady look.

"May I know, sir -- why ---- "

"Well, we are to be married in a month or so, and if anybody should tell her, I think I have that right."

I could divine the questions at the back of his mind. The police have to be suspicious.

"Did you see the lady last night -- anywhere, sir ? "

"Yes, in Peter's cottage with her child."

"I see, sir. Nowhere else ? "

"No."

But his silly questions shocked and angered me.

"Oh, come officer, you surely don't suspect Miss Mallory of pushing that fellow into the sea ? "

"One has to think of everything, sir. And motives."

"Quite so. I had a pretty good motive."

"Maybe you did, sir, but from what Peter says -- no opportunity."

I made myself laugh, though P.C. White had become the dour and almost hostile official. Well, the job was his, but his suspicion sent me scrambling up rocks and over the sea wall towards the lane leading up the steep hill. I met no one.

II

As yet, St. Mawes had its eyelids closed, but as I reached the cottage its door opened and Simon Payelly came out. Thank God, for Simon !

"Hello, Simon, had some sleep ? "

"Just a bit of shut eye, sir."

"Tell me, where you awake most of the night ? "

"Yes, most of it."

"No one left the cottage ? "

He stared at me in astonishment.

"No, sir."

"Sure ? "

"Pretty sure. I'm a light sleeper and I didn't shut an eye till about four in the morning. I heard the old clock strike."

"Thank you, Simon. You'll know before long why that may be important. They want help down at the harbour. I'll stay here. We found that blackguard dead in the sea."

When Simon had hurried off, I stood at the foot of the stairs and listened. I could hear someone moving and then a door opened and I saw Mrs. Payelly at the top of the stairs.

"Oh, Mrs. Mary, will you tell Miss Mallory I want to see her. It is rather

important."

"I will, sir."

I went out into the garden and waited. The sun was up and the sky cloudless and the air fresh and clean. Why should human beastliness taint it? Peter's chrysanthemums were in full flower and I saw the blinds go up across the way. I was worried. I wanted some quiet corner where I could talk to Isolda unheard, and I remembered that there was another lane which ran westwards along the flanks of the hill. I leaned upon the white gate and tried to feel and appear unconcerned.

Then I heard the door open behind me. I turned and saw her framed in the doorway. I smiled at her, but she was smile less.

"What is it, Robert?"

She seemed to have divined bad news.

"I want to talk to you. Let's stroll."

She came to the gate, her eyes on mine. I opened the gate and put an arm about her. If we were to parade in public it should not be like yesterday's pilgrimage. We reached the opening of the other lane, passed along it until we came to some gardens that were shut in by a low stone wall. The sun was shining on us here and I turned her towards the wall.

"All serene here. It hurts me to trouble you, darling, but it will soon be over. Tell me, you did not leave the cottage last night?"

She looked at me questioningly.

"No, but why ----?"

"And Rita was with you?"

"Yes."

"A certain person was found drowned down yonder."

I felt her stiffen and I held her close.

"Oh -- Robert! Him?"

"Yes, damn him. It will mean ----"

She drew a deep breath and held it.

"That -- I -- shall have to ---- "

"Yes, both of us. Life might have spared you this."

Suddenly she drew away from me. She spread her arms upon the wall, her head went down on them, and that bowed head of hers hurt me. I touched her. She was motionless, rigid.

"Don't -- Robert, for a moment."

"I won't darling."

Her breath seemed to come again in little spasms, and I wished to God that Horwood was alive for me to get my hands on him.

"Robert ---- "

"Yes, my dearest ? "

"It means -- an inquest ? "

"Afraid so. I shall be sitting beside you."

"Oh -- Robert, it won't mean that Rita ---- "

I had not thought of that, and it shocked me.

"No. I'll try to see to that. And when it's all over, you and I ----
You've always been so brave."

And suddenly her head rose and she stood facing the sea, and the early light played upon her face and hair.

"Have I ? "

"Yes."

"How fate and fear and beastliness can hurt one. I'll face it, Robert."

I put an arm round her and she leaned against me.

"Then my darling -- we'll go home together."

III

Friends in need are friends indeed. I went down to shave and wash and

breakfast. The Morseleys were late that morning, and when I had finished I went across to the Morseley table. They -- of course -- had heard the news, but what I did not know was that Mrs. Morseley had heard the whole of Isolda's story. These two women had been close friends.

"Can I have a word with you, Morseley, after breakfast?"

"Sure."

I saw his wife look at him as a woman who is wise to many things looks at a man, and then she glanced at me. She smiled.

IV

I told Morseley the whole story, and the despicable part Horwood had played through all of it. We wanted to keep the child immune and Morseley with youngster of his own, understood me utterly. And what could be done about it. Isolda and I would have to go through the beastly business, but that Rita should be dragged in to listen to all that tarnish was incredible.

"No -- by hell ----" and then his wife came in and sat down like some benign *Dia Mater*, and looked at us both with her kind blue eyes. I was beginning to tell her, when she smiled and said, "I know," and there was something in the way she said it which had meaning for mere man.

Well, Morseley got about a good deal in this corner of Cornwall, like most Americans he was warm hearted and a go-getter. Moreover, I suspect that he had been prompted by his wife. They went off together in a car that morning and I gather they crashed official doors, and smashed official and professional aloofness. Sometimes bold humanity can transcend the convention. I believe they were told that this kind of intervention was most improper, but the official would listen.

Morseley came back with bright eyes.

"I was told to get the hell out of this."

"And did you ? "

"My wife didn't. I guess they are going to play -- your game -- cricket."

"Then ---- ? "

"Rita will be kept out of it."

"Thank God," said I, "and thank you ---- "

"No, thank my wife. I never knew she had such a tongue in her."

Isolda's Diary

Shall I ever forget coming out of the hotel with Rita, and seeing that red car and Horwood standing by it. My first impulse was to go back into the hotel, but some things and evil things have to be faced. Nor -- I think -- could any sane woman have forgotten the insane beastliness of his jealous and sottish spite.

I walked head in air, holding the child's hand and we had not gone ten yards before he began shouting at me. I was a harlot, the child a bastard, and I had been his mistress. The man might be mad and drunk but the infamy of the thing was incredible. He followed us with those foul bawlings and I glanced down at Rita's frightened little face.

"It's nothing, darling. The silly man is drunk."

But those other faces, at doors and windows, and the familiar faces of some of those we passed! I just walked and blindly, and he still followed us. My God, what a pilgrimage of public shame!

And then I saw Peter, and his swarthy face had a kind of white blaze.

I said, "Help me, Peter."

He seemed to flush past us and I heard the blows. I turned my head and saw Horwood flat on the ground and Peter standing over him. Oh, blessed blows!

And blessed cottage! I took Rita up the stairs and sat on the bed with the child on my knees. I was trembling. I felt cold, a queer, frozen sort of palsy. Could I ever face those familiar faces again? And what was the child thinking? And Robert?

How incredible and horrible!

I found myself stroking Rita's hair. She looked up at me and I saw her lips move. What words would come from them?

"The horrid man frightened me, mummy."

"Yes darling, but ---- "

"I'm not frightened now. And I do love you, mummy."

I just about burst into tears.

I thought when I saw Robert in the garden that he had bad news for me, but how both bad and good it was, I did not guess. One becomes so sensitive to the face of someone whom one loves. I rather suspected that he had another fracas with Horwood, and that he was still feeling fierce about it, but when he looked at me, his eyes were a lover's eyes. He put an arm round me and how glad I was of that arm and of what it symbolized. I could bear things if they did not take him away from me.

When we had walked along that other lane, and come to a quiet spot behind some gardens he drew me to the wall and stood still. It was all very lovely in the early sunlight and yet -- somehow -- sinister. I felt him hesitate and then he told me.

Oh -- my God !

For I understood at once what this meant to us, more scandal, questions, a public probing of all my secrets. Could I bear it ? And would the child be involved ? I was head down, desperate. I did not want to be touched even by him. It was like being alone with some fierce physical pain.

Then, reality seemed to flare in me, a kind of wild anger against humanity, and the evil it could throw like acid into one's face. I would fight it ; I would be fierce and tough, a brazen hussy if they chose to see me like that. I had been head-down but now I was head-in-air, and I felt the sunlight warming my face. He must have been watching me, for he put out an arm and drew me to him.

"Heads up, Isolda. We are in this together."

He kissed my hair, and suddenly the anger seemed to go out of me. I had him and his loyalty and his faith in me. I felt that there was nothing I

would not do for him. I could face it ; I would face it.

“ If we can keep Rita out of it ---- ”

“ Be damned to them. We will.”

I walked down with Isolda to attend the inquest and I had a curious feeling that the good-will of this little Cornish community was ours. There was no gooping and no chatter. After all -- we were lovers, and what does the old tag say ? The inquest was held in one of the local pubs and since the room was of no great size, its capacity was confined mainly to accommodating the jury, witnesses, etc, and in this sensation-loving world, the public showed strange sympathy by staying away. The Press of course was present. And I was determined -- if possible to persuade the Press to muzzle its own mouth.

I need not describe the proceedings. I was the first witness to be called, and in being completely candid, I hoped to save Isolda many questions. The Coroner was courteous, competent and unfussy. His impartiality was somehow partial ; he might have divined my purpose and approved of it. I had been the first to see the body ? Yes. And I had been up all night with Mr. Peter Payelly, watching by the deceased's car. And why ? He gave me the chance to be candid. I was candid. So, I had known the deceased ? I had and very much so as a bully, a drunkard and a cad, a dangerous cad. Well, never mind the rest. The Coroner pulled me up gently, but he had let me get my oar in, and somehow the faces of the jury were friendly and benign.

I think Peter Payelly's one remark was more efficacious than any other answer given by any of us.

So, the deceased was following the lady and the child and shouting unpleasant things at them. Yes. And what action did you take ?

" I knocked the drunken savage flat on the cobbles."

I was conscious of a shuffling sound that might have been applause. The doctor and P.C. White were the next witnesses. Death by drowning, bruises on the head, an alcoholic stomach.

Then came Isolda's ordeal.

She was calm, pale, head in air. The Coroner was kind to her. Almost immediately he managed to suggest that -- while in the dead man's employment -- she had suffered persecution. She had. He so handled the matter that the inference was obvious. I might have been sitting on a bench of thorns, but as the situation developed, the prickles ceased to vex me. I watched the faces of the jury, and with one exception, they were friendly. The exception was a bane and acidulated looking lady who might have regarded any Lovely as no better than she should be.

Then a few questions from the jury. One elderly gentleman wanted to know whether the doctor's evidence was consistent with Horwood's having fallen of the quay in the dark, and when funnelled with drink.

Absolutely so. It appeared to be the most probably explanation.

Then the acid lady wanted to know how long Isolda had known the deceased.

A few months.

And why had Miss Mallory, knowing the nature of the deceased, consented to serve in such a house ?

Promptly, the Coroner snubbed her and someone tittered.

The Coroner summed up. He emphasized the doctor's evidence and Peter Payelly's description of Horwood's drunken hysteria. His points were made with simplicity and sense and when he put the final question to the jury, it took them just three minutes to arrive at a decision. The foreman announced it. Death by misadventure while under the influence of alcohol. I had referred to the whisky bottle I had found in Horwood's car.

I gave Isolda my arm. I saw nothing but friendly faces. Even P.C. White, standing beside a large Police Inspector from somewhere, looked at us with a human twinkle in his eyes. Would the Police accept the verdict ? I glanced at the big, ruddy, face of the Inspector and he smiled at me.

That smile seemed to say, " Good luck, sir. The devil is dead as the devil should be."

II

I -- in my happiness -- staged a parade that same day. I had trouble in persuading Isolda to humour me, and it was Rita who settled the question for us.

" Do you like ices, Rita ? "

Did she like ices ! She put her arms round my neck and I planted a kiss on her little freckled nose.

" Well, that settles it."

" Mummy is coming too ? "

I looked at Isolda and her face was not the face of the morning. Maybe she saw life with the eyes of her child. Innocence was to walk the streets with us and salute love with a cream cornet.

I called for them at Payelly's about four o'clock and I had prepared the feast at a particular tea-shop which specialised in cakes and ices. Isolda was wearing the frock I had first seen at Paddington, but her face was not the remote and austere face of that wet June day. Rita walked between us, holding our hands, and that human link was a symbol.

We passed down to the sea, and turned westwards away from the little harbour. It was not a tripper day, and the faces we saw were St. Mawes faces. They smiled upon us, and I wanted Isolda to feel those smiles. I can remember one particular incident which made me feel good. We were passing the white cottage where Joe's father and mother lived. They might have been waiting for us, a comely old couple with the fine and simple manners of a happier generation. Joe's father had a flower in his hand. He stepped out, put a finger to his white head and smiled all over his

handsome old face at Rita.

“ Would you like a flower, my dear ? ”

“ Oh, thank you. It's a pretty flower.”

“ So is someone else.”

And old Ben Harvey had a kiss.

Isolda's Diary

I wonder if this little Cornish place understood his gesture as I did ? It was so simple, and so right and so like him. I think that good motives are more obvious to the simple folk who are not cursed with the malady of self-analysis. Almost you could have put it into Biblical language, "The man, the woman, and the child walked together by the sea. And the sun shone upon them, and the eyes of those who looked upon them were kind." Yes, just that. But I had a feeling of being healed, and that the bitterness within me was passing.

After that sumptuously simple tea, and Rita had creamed her face with two cream cornets, and had it solemnly wiped by him, we walked up the ball to the Castle and sat there on the grass to watch the sun go down. Robert took Rita on his knees, and she made eyes at him and he found a last speck of cream to be removed from her face.

"Well, Miss Mischief, here's a poser for you. Uncle Bob is going to be Father Bob."

"Are you to be my father ?"

"I hope so."

"Does mother mind ?"

Both of us laughed.

I said, "I hope not."

I often have noticed that when a novelist is staging either subliminal or active drama he has to bring Nature into the scene, and grow lyrical about the landscape. Well, there is no need for me to grow lyrical about Hurtfield. You cannot put a home into prose, but you can feel it, and be soothed by it and react to its many memories. I came to it on an autumn day with Robert and the child, and I came as his wife. The good Bill had met us

at the station, and Betty was there at the door. I had been wondering about these two, and how they would accept me, but I need not have worried. Women can be pretty sensitive to each other, and there was no hostility or surprise holding back in Betty.

But the memories of our home-coming on that autumn day centred about two incidents, Rita's excitement and the way she and Robert went exploring hand in hand. She had to see the garden-house and the boathouse and studio where that portrait of herself hung upon a wall. The old home itself was a magic place to her, especially so the Queen's Room and the gallery, and the great oak stairs. Her little freckled face confronted me on those stairs.

" Oh, Mummy, isn't it wonderful ? "

It was.

Then in the dusk, he and I wandered out and across to The Meadows. The place was completely silent, lightless, yes, dead as all my unhappy years. We stood with our arms round each other and looked at it, and I was moved to wonder at this new, fantastic world.

I said, " I suppose this place was an Escape House. Drinks and thrills -- in these drab years, and challenge to austerity."

He laughed.

" Well, yes, escape from living by regulation. I'd prefer the old lady and her cats. And craftsmen are escapists. We seem to be the only somewhat free people left in the world."

I understood him. I said, " Not by way of The Meadows, but through other and more mysterious fields."

He kissed my hair.

" With the Botticelli girl whom I met at Paddington."

AN AFTERGLEAM

Yes, we are somewhat free at Hurtfield in spite of the new totalitarianism tyranny which is creeping like a palsy over the old country. I can paint when I please, and where I please, and as of yet, I have not had to submit my portraits to a committee consisting of miners, porters, and bar-excheters. I am not moved to apologising for my success, though to be successful is the supreme sin against a standardised community.

We have a small son who is the most absolute and successful tyrant so far as the petticoat population of Hurtfield is concerned. Rita is growing into a lovely young woman and is quite talented with the piano. Betty is her teacher and both Betty and Bill have showered love on both of the children and Isolda. To all of us, they are now Uncle Bill and Aunt Betty.

I am exhorted to conserve and save money, but I don't. This lovely place has not been smudged out by the large feet of Mr. Shinwell. Mr. Beven doesn't bother me. We are uninsured, but I pay private fees to Dr. Sam Baker, whose conscience has not been drugged by over-work. Enjoy the day and the moment, and shrug your shoulders at the future. We may be no more than discursive atoms dispersed by an atomic bomb.

The Meadows was put up for sale by private treaty. We purchased it to prevent any reoccurrence of a septic establishment into our peaceful life here. Isolda guided the gentrification of its decadent decor into that of a quiet, comfortable hostel for female agricultural students. They are hearty, merry wenches, and some of them have become our friends.

So, the modern, political cinema show moves gradually and perhaps inevitably towards chaos. Someday the happy wisdom of the craftsman may be reborn in a strange and less crowded world.

11

LIFE - AND HOPE

Home, Work, Wife and Children

By WARWICK DEMPING

Those of us who, when young, delighted in the adventures of Robinson Crusoe or the Swiss Family Robinson might in our maturer years discover in this most wonderful of villages a living book more fascinating than the romances of our childhood.

For from those in this village you can listen to tales of storm and of shipwreck, of men and women who were smothering in the sea, and who were rescued and brought to land.

Death was the sea, and disease their disaster, and for their salvation the spirit of Christ walked upon the bitter waters.

Travel along the Old North Road from Foynton and its chalk hills and you come quite suddenly to this green valley.

What do you see? Newly built cottages, a white-porched house on a hill, old trees, an estate office, workshops, hostels, a village hall, a village shop.

The casual motorist might assume that some firm had transferred its works and its workers to the country.

He might pass on without realising that he had touched at Crusoe's Island, and been so near to the most remarkable village community in England.

Ten years or so ago there was nothing here but a farmhouse and its outbuildings, the hall on the hill, and two or three cottages.

Tell this to the casual person and he might reply: "Well, there's nothing very extraordinary about that. Look at Edgward and Hendon."

But if you went on to explain to him that this flourishing

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ty had been built up by and for men and women who had been under sentence of death, he might stare at you incredulously and accuse you of leg-pulling.

Think of it! Consider the audacity and the courage and the wisdom that were needed for the conception and carrying through of such an enterprise.

To create a community of the stricken, to provide them with everything that a normal community requires, a hospital, workshops, homes, a school, clubs. To make it self supporting.

To create out of nothing a series of small factories, to train a large number of your operatives, to produce articles of the first quality and to sell them at a profit. Well might many captains of industry quail before such a problem.

When you have seen Papworth and grasped its infinite, human significance, the inevitable question rises to your lips.

"How did it begin? How was it possible?"

Assuredly, it is an epic tale, the epic of Life and the White Death. It grew out of the compassion and the prevision of one man.

It began with a tent in a garden. It transferred itself to a village and dared disaster on a capital of three hundred pounds. Still greatly daring, and inspired by its human purpose it came to Papworth.

It became Papworth. It can boast of a trade turnover of some £70,000 a year, and of a population of some eight hundred souls. It became a place of pilgrimage for kings and princes, scientists and sociologists, working men and working women.

Sit and talk to its creator, Sir Pendrill Varrier-Jones, in that quiet room of his in Papworth Hall. He will not boast to you, but he

If he chooses tell you a story that will move you to wonder and pity his wisdom he could understand that there are sick souls as well as sick bodies, and that hopelessness can kill.

Give people hope and you give them life.

Give people work, and hope has foundations upon which to build.

Take a man who has been an outcast because of his disease, and give him once more a place among his fellows, and he is once more a man.

Give him back his home, work, wife and children, and the vitalizing effect upon him may be extraordinary.

"How platitudinous!" one hears the clever little people saying, but the simple things of life are its blood and its bread.

The creator of Papworth can say "As a physician I came to heal and to help, and in helping I became more than a physician."

"I found that I had to turn myself into a tradesman, a manufacturer, a financier, a sociologist, an administrator. And no one has helped more than many of the men I tried to help."

Probably he will not say these things, but to those who understand the life of Papworth will say them for him.

Let us take a typical case. A working man has developed phthisis. Perhaps he is sent to a sanatorium, leaving his wife and children to do the best they can. His home may have gone, his furniture been sold up. He has ceased to be a bread-winner. His mental distress does not help him.

Perhaps he is discharged from the sanatorium with his disease arrested.

What next?

He attempts to return to his trade. In all probability he will find

old workshops closed to him. He is tainted, a possible source of infection. Other men are not willing to work at his side.

He goes elsewhere. Perhaps he conceals the secret of his taint. He gets a job. And then? He, a man who is not quite fit for the normal struggle, has to keep pace and compete with the fit. He attempts it; he breaks down, and his state, both mental and physical, is more deplorable than ever.

Hopelessness!

From the very beginning Papworth has set itself to combat this terrible hopelessness.

In the workshops of Papworth the man in whom the disease has been arrested does not have to compete with men who are fit.

He is with fellow sufferers. His work is graded. Gradually he is tuned to the rhythm of a working day, but a day that is merciful.

His beginnings may be tentative. He is watched, and periodically he is examined. If his physical condition warrants it he becomes a four hour man. He may become a six hour man. As far as is practicable he is paid at trade union rates.

He lives in a comfortable hostel. He has all the human fellowship of a community, music, games, books, wireless.

If he is married he may become the tenant of one of the estate cottages, and is joined by his wife and children. Once more he is a creature of hope and pride and self-regard.

He is a man among men, not a poor derelict slowly and hopelessly smothering in his own sputum.

In these rather tired and troubled days of ours one so often hears the cry: "Does anything matter? Is anything worth while?"

hide our heart-break behind flippancies.

I would say that there is no other place in England so capable of curing us of this *maladie moderne*.

Is it worth while ? One does not come away from Papworth with such a question one's lips.

One exclaims : "By God, this is good business. That which is being done here is infinitely worth while."

If life has to be lived on cocktails, what of it ? The patience and courage of such a community as this makes sensationalism appear what it is, mere drugging, cowardice.

If I had my say . . .

Sane Words to a Mad World



The chance to broadcast comes to comparatively few. Supposing you were given ten uncensored minutes "on the air," what would you say? JOHN BULL puts the question to some prominent writers. First is a famous novelist, who "gets off his chest" a number of things he thinks the world should hear.

by WARWICK DEEPING

THIS English peace! Do you and I always realise what it means to us?

As an Italian waiter said to me: "This is about the only country in which you can say what you please without being put in prison or stabbed in the back."

What a mad world! Yet in England, in spite of our motor traffic and our many muddles, we remain somewhat sane.

We try to allow the other fellow to have his say.

I don't like the Fascists. I don't like the Communists. But I would allow both sides to let off steam.

We unrabid people, if necessary, can always step in and turn off the gas.

Aeroplanes I hate, but I am glad that we have hundreds up in the sky.

With the Germans I should like to be friends.

Very tired of Mussolini as nuisance value, and I wish somebody would sit on his large head.

Incidentally, I should like to see China give the Japs a knock.



Thank God I don't live in Russia. A most interesting experiment, of course, but I should object most strongly to being experimented upon in person.

Peace! This English peace! But not peace at any price or at anybody's dictation. Let us and the Americans get together and shout "No, sir!"

I try to believe in a God, but not always successfully so, but I do believe that this England of ours and its heritage are worth fighting for. Yes, to the last bomb and in spite of the Pacifists. The wolves are out, and we should be but sheep without good dogs and shepherd and a gun.

To work peacefully in my garden is bliss. This is the land of gardens. But if any bandit should come over my fence I should be moved to give him one under the ribs with my digging-fork.

As the world is constituted at present, it seems to me that pure pacifism is a dangerous dream. Do we realise how we are hated in Europe?

Certain hungry peoples wish to say to England, "You old bandit, you grabbed more than your share. And now that you are a little senile and fat with possessions, we'll take from you that which we need." Diplomacy, like a Japanese apology, may be dope to keep us dozing and dreaming.

I am afraid I would vote for putting the League of Nations in the refrigerator, and for concentrating on the Fire Brigade.

When there are no fires threatening we can take our ideals out of cold storage.

When will that be, if ever? When our economists have managed to satisfy all men and all nations, and all women? Is the human animal ever satisfied? Would it be good for man not to struggle?

Perhaps we shall move towards peace when

we all play games together, and when any person who develops symptoms of the Autocrat's Disease is put instantly into an asylum.

But we have our smaller autocrats and officials. I would have them all slipped once a week, and reminded that they are here to serve and not to scold.

We are proud of our police. But do we realise how dangerous a too dominant police force can be?

I wish the Inland Revenue could be taught to refrain from sending out their nice little envelopes just before Christmas. Only a Government department could be capable of such crudity.

Charitable societies I dislike, and I wish one did not have the suspicion that half the proceeds pass in paying for administration. I prefer my gift to go straight into the pocket that needs it.

For my part I prefer to help those who are worth helping.

Should like to see England cleared of charity, partly because modern begging is approaching blackmail, and because begging should not be necessary. The whole community should plan for and be responsible for all its sickness, pain and misfortune.

A feeling I have is that the medical service should be de-commercialised. Also, all nursing homes. So many of them exploit sickness at the very time when sickness makes us poorer. The prospect of an exorbitant bill is not exactly soothing to the sufferer.

Were it possible to give our politicians and legislators a five years' holiday I should rejoice. A tired German said to me in a German spa, "Ah, it is peaceful here because we have no politics."



Why are my friends the Socialists so smug? The assumption of so much virtue bores one. We people who respect achievement are not all blacklegs and blackguards.

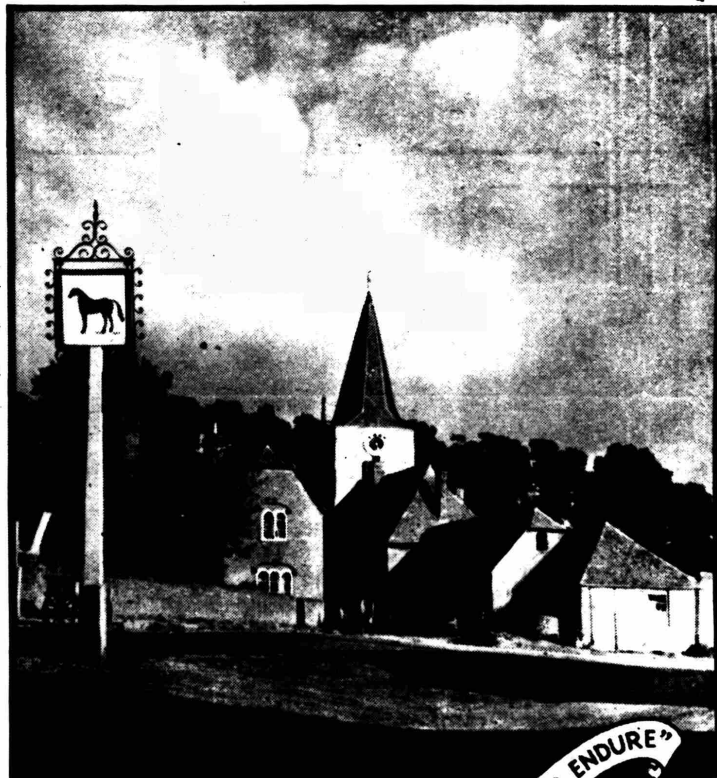
Can't the Law cease from being a game of blind-man's-buff, and the bandage from the eyes of Justice be removed? Could it not be arranged for justice to be intelligible to all plain men of good will, and not a juggling with professional jargon?

Then I think one should be a little ashamed of being too rich. I should be inclined to regard a great fortune as tainted, unless the owner could explain its origin in public, and justify its use.

Like many other plain men, I am beginning to be nauseated by propaganda. I hate the sight and sound of certain words: Capitalist, Bolshevik, Marxist.

Let us get rid of the lie that all citizens are of equal value to the community. They are not and never will be. And rewards should be apportioned to social value.

As the world is, I believe in rewards. Do the reformers never dangle little things that glitter?



In Russia, do the elect go unrewarded? Are the contumacious never starved into silence?

On the other hand, I should like to see profits limited and any surplus distributed in raising salaries and wages. I believe in service, but I also believe in initiative and guts.

A pauper State may be just a cabbage-patch. As a grower and lover of trees I know how they differ. And you can't use poplar in place of oak.



As to the New Morality, it amuses me. Marriage is to be obsolete, sex must be free, the family broken up and the children reared in State-controlled institutions. I tried it on my gardener, and his question was, "And who's going to cook my dinner?"

The young interest me. I try to appreciate their difficulties. I understand why most young people feel the urge to become reformers. There are many things calculated to make them see red. I did so in my own youth.

But, for the young man who says that life is not worth living, and who sets out to prove it dearly in the best Oxford manner, I have no use at all. I would conscript him into a Labour Corps, and set him for a year to clean out ditches.

Prejudice I accept, provided it does not get out of hand and bludgeon me unless I salute its mumbo-jumbo. No man is quite free from prejudice. Passion and prejudice are the forces that drive us.

The people who claim to be virtuously impartial I distrust. I suspect them of hiding their particular prejudice under a surplice, and of being interested in the contents of other people's pockets.

Self-interest is universal. The problem is to chasten the greedy child in man. Let him have cake, but not too much cake.

My personal credo? It doesn't amount to much. Try not to hurt; try to help when you can. Mind your own business. It is more important than minding the other fellow's.

And my hope? That this English spirit of ours will survive. That we shall keep our kindness and our tolerance, and our genius for compromise, but that we shall have the courage and the strength to refuse all compromise with violence and cruelty.

May our England endure.

Next week another famous writer will "have his say" in "John Bull."